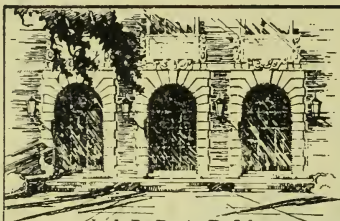


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# CLARA HARRINGTON.

*A Domestic Tale.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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# CLARA HARRINGTON.

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## CHAPTER I.

“She knew well labour, but none idle ease.”

CHAUCER.

WHEN Lord Ashford entered his sister's room, Matilda was lying asleep on the sofa by Mrs. Grey, and Charles was kneeling by the child, whose arm was still round his neck ; a slight sob bursting every now and then from her. Lord Ashford having re-

quested Charles to leave the room, spoke to his sister as follows :—

“ Have you thought further, Constance, on the subject we were talking of this morning ? ”

“ Yes,” she answered, “ yes, a great deal ; and I am ready to tell you how I have decided.” She said this kindly, and took his hand, which he almost immediately withdrew ; but she went on in the same spirit and tone :

“ I have decided to accede to your proposal.”

Lord Ashford bowed stiffly and said, “ You are extremely good.”

“ I will accede to your proposal that I should take charge of the management and education of Matilda, as you think I can do so better than Lady Ashford.”

“Excuse me, Constance, I never said so. If it suited Lady Ashford to take charge of her daughter, I do not think of saying she could not perfectly well do so.”

“Well, well, I know all that. I ought to have said that you wished to place her under my charge; and now that it has become quite necessary for her to be placed under some proper guidance—”

Lord Ashford was going to speak, but she said gently,

“No, pray hear me to the end. I remember—we both, dear Ashford, remember—too much of the miseries of our childhood, not to be anxious to spare her the bare possibility of any sufferings of that kind; and I believe I could do well by her; but you know I have children under my own charge, to whom my care belongs before all

others ; and if my taking charge of Matilda interfered with that first duty, I should not feel myself justified in doing it. Charles's home-education, however, is at present at an end, and as he will now be placed, I shall, indeed, be able to be more to him in leaving my little home at Shirley." Her eyes filled with tears.

" I should be extremely sorry for you to do what is so disagreeable to you, Constance, as coming to live in your brother's house, while you feel it is so great a sacrifice."

" It is a great sacrifice to leave the home where I have been so truly at peace, for home is duly prized by me. But a great many reasons combine to make it right ; not only Matilda—well I will not include her, since it offends you, but, Charles. I am very grateful to you, Ashford, for the kind-



ness you show him—*very* grateful to you, and thankful to heaven that your former dislike has changed into a tender affection.”

“Pardon me, Constance. I never disliked him. It was his father whom I, with reason, disliked and disapproved of.”

Constance’s brow flushed with indignation.

“We will not speak of the dead,” she replied, in a voice of severity, such as no one would have supposed she could use—“and let me say all that I have to say, and then if you do not like my plan, let us think no more of it. The plan most agreeable to me would be, as I told you this morning, to take Matilda with me to my cottage, and devote myself to her there.”

“That cannot be, Constance, I have already told you that I do not choose that

it should be said either that Lady Ashford cannot regulate the education of her own daughter, or that my sister keeps a school. I do not choose, moreover, that my daughter should not live under her father's roof."

"This being your state of feeling, I will consent to take up my abode with you for the present, in order to fulfil a duty which I feel to be important, and which my heart inclines towards; for this dear child interests me deeply. But I must stipulate that my privacy should be strictly respected. It neither suits my taste nor my health to mix in society. I must be able to feel myself secure in perfect privacy in my own rooms, there to receive any friends I like, or to be alone, quite independently of the rest of the family."

Lord Ashford's face had grown first red

with anger, and now had become quite pale with its excess.

“I, too, must stipulate, Mrs. Grey. You talk of receiving any one you choose in your own rooms, but I must beg permission to make some exceptions. I shall presently name some whom you harbour as acquaintances, but first I must say that I cannot permit my wife and daughter to associate with a young lady who professes such opinions as Miss Grey does, and who chooses to act so independently, setting all decorum at defiance.”

“This,” said Constance, “is in reality the source of my difficulty in the whole scheme. Wherever my home is, there also must Ellenor’s be ; and I will permit no stipulations to be made about whom I shall receive there. You know perfectly well that companionship

with immoral people would be as odious to me as to your own wife and daughter, and therefore I will not hear a word on the subject."

"Excuse me once again, Mrs. Grey. There may be different opinions, different notions as to who is moral and respectable, and who not."

"I know there may be, and are, and as I shall never call in question the guests whom you receive, so I will not allow you to interfere with mine. Without this understanding I will not leave my home, where up to this time I have lived in complete independence, without receiving or asking for the slightest pecuniary help. No—had it been pressed upon me, I would not have accepted it on any consideration. That I have been able to do without it has been an



unspeakable blessing to me. How I could have acted if I had been obliged to receive it, God knows ! But as it has not been one of the trials sent for my endurance, I do not trouble myself with thinking of it."

"Will you be good enough to explain to whom you alluded as direputable acquaintances of mine and Lady Ashford's."

"No, Ashford, I do not wish to say bitter things of any one."

"Yes, Mrs. Grey, I must insist upon it. I will not have such an aspersion cast on every visitor and friend I have."

Constance looked annoyed, but could hardly suppress a smile as she said, "I do not think that Sir Frederick Buckton's manners or morals, if strictly inquired into, could be considered perfectly correct."

"Sir Frederick Buckton, Mrs. Grey, will

never enter my house again, with my consent, after his behaviour to-night."

"Ashford," said Constance, "you and I know, and every one knows, that there is a certain morality which the world requires, and a boundless immorality which it countenances if the first be adhered to. I have long retired from the world's society, as you know, and I do not mean to return to it ; therefore it cannot be necessary for me to adopt its notions of right and wrong ; I may follow my own. I have not the least intention of outraging the world's opinion on any point so material to it as to lead it to quarrel with me and throw stones at me ; for the sake not only of myself, perhaps, but certainly for the sake of my connection with others. On this you may rely, and with this you must rest

satisfied, or the whole plan must be given up. Think it over, and talk it over with Lady Ashford, and we will decide to-morrow."

"I shall not think of consulting her for a moment about it"—— he was going probably to worry over the whole matter again till he had torn Mrs. Grey's patience to tatters, when he was interrupted by Lady Ashford coming into the room, and kindly asking after her sister's health. In a few words Constance told her of the new plan, and asked her opinion of it. Delicately and carefully as it was done, still a scarcely perceptible flush, as if she felt the slight which Lord Ashford had put on her, passed over her face, but she almost immediately said, in a cheerful voice :—

“It is always a pleasure and comfort to me to have you with me, my dear ; and if you can make such a sacrifice for Matilda’s benefit, I think the plan an excellent one, and on the whole one that it will be prudent and proper for you to accept, and certainly extremely suitable in every way for all parties. Shall I order Harris to come for Matilda? She ought to be in bed. Good night, my dear. I would advise your going to bed also ; it is late, and you are far from strong ;” so saying, she went away.

Lord Ashford was walking gloomily up and down the room, but no sooner had he heard these words and seen Lady Ashford go away so peacefully than he sat down by Constance, with a face so much relieved, so different in expression, that he seemed a



different person. It was evident that the cause of his difficulty was, in truth, that the arrangement would not be agreeable to her.

“Constance,” he said, “you have always been a comforter to me. I have anxieties, griefs,—which would well be an apology for some of my faults. If you knew what I have suffered you would not allow yourself to be irritated with me. If you knew the sacrifices to duty and honour which I have made, without hesitation ; how I have plucked out all the joys and pleasures of life, and have been content to plod on in the dreary, barren path which it was my duty to tread ; how I have forsaken the pleasant companions of my heart to drag on a wearisome yoke with those who care nothing for me, and who are nothing to me beyond what duty prescribes ;—if you knew

how strictly I have done this, and how faithfully, you would not think it so hard that I should require and expect some little sacrifice from you."

"Whenever duty does call I shall not fail. You know that. But are you sure that duty has really demanded the sacrifices of you? Are you sure that you have really made the right choice? that the world has not been the arbitrator? that false honours have not directed you?"

"There was once a time when I might have done differently. But that is past; and you, at least, have no right to accuse me. You followed your own inclination, you thought only of your own gratification in your marriage, but I thought of you and made this sacrifice for your sake,—thanklessly, it is true."

Constance was now shedding bitter and choking tears, but she made no reply, and many minutes passed before a word was spoken ; at last he said :

“I did not mean to distress you. Pray excuse me for having done so. The time is passed since that other path might have been followed by me, and I do not know that even, without the consideration of your interest to control my choice, I should have thought it right on my own account to act differently. It would have required sacrifices which I doubt whether any man is justified in making. It would have set an example which would have been or might have been highly injurious, and, at any rate, it is now worse than useless to recur to it. I made my choice and did my duty ;

and now it remains for me to persevere in it, whatever it may cost."

"But may I venture to speak with you, on one subject that weighs heavily on me, dearest Ashford,—I mean Lady Ashford? You do not do her justice. You give her no chance of being a comfort to you."

"Perhaps not—perhaps not; but I cannot do it; her coldness has repelled all the advances I have made,—and I have made them, I do assure you. No one can accuse me of being an unkind or inconsiderate husband. I have never used a harsh expression to her; I have given her the utmost freedom of action; and I would refuse her nothing. God knows, I should be excusable to do so, considering the immense

property which she brought with her; but this must be an interdicted subject between us, Constance. Some day, perhaps, you will know more. This, however, I can assure you—you will never have the sorrow of knowing that your brother has acted in any way dishonourably.”

So saying, he stooped down to Matilda, whom Mrs. Grey, dismissing the nurse, had undertaken to carry to bed herself; but the sleeping child, disliking the disturbance of his kiss, pushed away his face. Irritated and offended, he started back, and said:

“We will not talk further to-night. I have still much to do before morning. Good night.”

Lord Ashford sat in his library, writing hastily a long letter. His brow was heavy

with care, and he looked exhausted with fatigue and distress of mind. At last, the letter was folded and sealed; and on the following morning he himself went out, and with his own hands put the packet into the post-office.

## CHAPTER II.

“ Oh ! no more, oh ! never, never more !  
Shall friend or flowers return,  
Till deadly Winter, old, and cold, and froze,  
Has laid all Nature, lifeless, in his urn.  
O'er the mountains,  
O'er the fountains,  
Through the woodland, dim and gray,  
Death and Winter, dread companions,  
Have pursued their destined way.”

WILLIAM HOWITT.

THE bright, warm days that so often  
appear, with their deceitful smiles, in early  
spring, and which had tempted the three

friends to take that eventful stroll in the wood the week before, when they had encountered Sir Frederick Buckton, had now given place to a return of cold, wintry weather. The wind, even in the sheltered retreat of Clara's home, was damp and piercing ; but in London, there was a thick, dirty-looking fog, which rendered it equally difficult to see and to breathe.

In the midst of this general gloom, there was one warm and cheerful room, not, indeed, wholly free from the misty atmosphere, but the window-shutters were closed, the comfortable-looking curtains were drawn: there was a bright fire, a cheerful light, a table prepared for the grateful refreshment of tea; and the expression of the countenances of the two persons who sat near it, engaged in earnest conversation, indi-



cated a forgetfulness of the discomfort, and even the existence, of the external world.

It was in the early part of the evening of the second day after the events just related had taken place, that Dr. Weston had joined Leonora at her house, to spend, as was not unusual, a few hours of the evening with her ; and they were now talking, with deep interest and some concern, about their mutual friend.

“I am uneasy,” said Leonora, “about our encounter in the wood with that hateful man.”

“Why should that give you any concern?”

“Because, in the shape of a man of rank, he is, in fact, a monkey of a vicious disposi-

tion; and being half an idiot, he neither cares for, nor foresees the consequences of what he says and does."

"Monkey or idiot, of what concern is it to us?"

"Perhaps not much; but still I have myself endured some persecution from him and he is, I know, acquainted with Lord Ashford."

"Yes," replied Dr. Weston, thoughtfully, "I remember; and he has seen Lord Ashford with Clara. Do you think, after so long an absence, and with so great a change as has taken place in her, he would be likely to recollect her?"

"I do not know," said Leonora. "The tenacity of the memory of those creatures is extraordinary; and in the momentary

glance that I had of him, I perceived a meaning and a maliciousness in his eye that gave me a painful feeling."

"I am not satisfied with Clara's position," replied Dr. Weston; "and now that her health is established, and she is stronger, both in mind and body, than she ever was, I own it would have given me extreme gratification if I could have perceived any indication that she was thinking with seriousness and right-mindedness of her own future, and of that of Bertha."

"You mean a future worked out by herself for herself," said Leonora.

"I do."

"Ah! that was my hope when these sad events occurred, and it was to help her in that course that I wished to live."

"But we saw, and felt, and acknowledged

to our own hearts, and to each other, that such a course was not possible at that time. Self-reliance, then, would have implied the extinction of love in her heart ; but it was the devotion of love that sustained her ; without that, she would certainly have perished."

"Yes ; it was a sweet illusion, of which it would have been cruel, perhaps fatal, to have deprived her ; but still it was an illusion."

"There was no illusion on her part, nor probably on his, at that time. She, at least, acted from the impulse of deep affection, and Time, by the experience which this great teacher gives—that is, by clearing away the mistiness that creates illusion—has only placed in a clearer light the steadiness and strength of that love, which,

in a moment of such suffering and distraction, led her directly and trustingly to her decision."

"Yes, it is quite true," replied Leonora, "that her sole thought in accepting the home he provided for her, was that it might help to lessen his suffering; it was a gentle and womanly feeling, and the heart that was capable of it, was also capable of a pure and sweet happiness."

"And she has not lost it," said Dr. Weston, in the clear, slow, almost solemn voice in which it was natural to him to express deep emotion; "we have seen it; we have shared it; we have increased it by sharing it; and we have each of us been made happier and better by the participation."

"It has been the great privilege and

blessedness of our life," cried Leonora, with glowing animation ; "but our task is not finished. I am certain the time will come when she will again require all our care."

"But she is better prepared for whatever may happen, if exertion and suffering are still before her; and we, also, are better prepared to help her, for the past may reasonably give us greater confidence both in her and in ourselves."

At this moment, a carriage stopped at the door; then followed a knock that startled the quiet talkers, and the next moment Clara and Bertha were in the room.

Clara was pale and agitated ; Bertha was in a state of excitement, but not suffering ; Clara threw herself into Leonora's arms

without speaking, and Bertha also clung to her.

As soon as some degree of composure was restored to the party, and Clara had been made to take her accustomed place on the sofa, Leonora kneeling at her side, and holding the trembling hands of her friend in her own, Clara said ;—

“ I do not come to you my beloved friend for counsel, only for help. The time has come which you anticipated, and the dark shadow of which has sometimes passed before my own view ; but it has come suddenly, and in a cruel manner.”

The two friends looked at her anxiously and inquiringly, but her voice faltered, and she was silent.

“ I grieve for him,” resumed she, after a short pause : “ Oh, what is he not now suf-

fering! Oh, that I could purchase his happiness, his peace of mind, at any cost to my own!”

Neither of her friends ventured to speak.

“But it is impossible,” she resumed: “this is not an act of love, it is one of tyranny: love cannot reach it, and it is, therefore, past cure.”

“Yes,” she continued in an altered tone, as if answering her own inward thoughts, “it has shown me a dreadful truth; the scales have fallen from my eyes, and I know my destiny.”

She put a letter into Leonora’s hands, who read as follows:—

“I have been surprised and mortified at hearing that, notwithstanding the stipulation I made this time five years, you have thought proper to wander about the country



with the person whom I so earnestly requested you not to be seen with in public. You were not debarred from familiar intercourse with her. I even gave my consent that her brother should be your medical guardian. I trusted that your own good sense and proper feeling would have prevented you from disregarding my wishes. But I am informed that, neglecting your child, you spend your time in going about the country with this lady, exposing yourself to the impertinent surmises of any libertine who may choose to accost you, leaving your doors invitingly open, that you may be followed when you please to withdraw, and in such a manner as to excite at once mystery and suspicion.

“ I write now to inform you, that, to prevent the most disastrous consequences

resulting from your conduct, you must immediately leave your present abode, where I had hoped you might have remained in comfort and respectability for the rest of your life. I will provide another home for you, but it must be in a foreign country, and on the solemn consideration and promise, that from this moment all intercourse, whether by letter or otherwise, with the person I have alluded to, shall utterly and entirely cease. Let me have this promise instantly,—by to-morrow's post."

Leonora, without speaking, gave the letter to Dr. Weston. While he was perusing it, she buried her burning cheek in Clara's bosom.

Dr. Weston looked up mournfully as he finished reading the letter, and gazed steadfastly at Clara; their eyes met, the sad

future which distinctly rose up before his view had moistened his, but there was no tear in hers.

“The last link that united us,” said Clara, in a voice touching from the tremulousness that disturbed its calmness, “is broken. We can never again in this life hold anything in common. That is a dreadful thought.”

“It is dreadful,” murmured Leonora, “to a heart like yours, it is next to the desolateness of despair.”

“God is merciful to us,” answered Clara, “and prepares us for our allotted course. Five years ago the realization of this idea would have killed me, but, happily, I have not been allowed to spend these five years in vain. I have been taught to perceive, that selfishness in sorrow is no less weak

and wicked than other forms of selfishness, and that the stroke of affliction, however severe, does not release us from the duties we owe to ourselves, and those who are dear to us."

"Heaven bless you," said Dr. Weston, rising from his seat, "but I should rather say its blessing is on you, for it has turned your weakness into strength, and out of the very depths of sorrow and despair, has given you courage and hope."

"I do feel grateful for the measure of strength which is given me; but you must rejoice for me with fear and trembling. I am apprehensive that I shall fail in the course I wish to pursue, from utter want of power."

"Oh, do not think so," cried Leonora; "the sorrow that has not killed you has

blessed you, and the resolution that has sustained you in the past will not fail you in the future."

"I hope you will prove to be a true prophet, and I hope so the more because you will help to realize your own prophecy. Twice before, my beloved friends, you have cherished and saved me, and you will sustain me now, will you not?"

The friends answered with their eyes, not by their lips, and Clara, whose heart throbbed with the sweet and soothing answer which it thus received, continued:—

"I feel that I now need your protection and help as much as ever. I am again desolate and a wanderer. It is difficult to work for doubtful, and at all events, distant success, with a wounded spirit like mine. I cannot undertake it without you;

but if you will teach me not to lose confidence in myself, I will do my part."

"What is your purpose and plan?" asked Leonora, gently, and with a look of anxiety.

"Perhaps you will think me presumptuous," replied Clara, in a subdued voice, but still with a firmness which is not incompatible with true humility; "I may have mistaken, miscalculated my power, but I own to you that I have sometimes thought that I might turn my taste for drawing to account."

"You are right," cried Dr. Weston; "you will have the blessing of Him who rewards the improvement of the talent which He lends, by increasing it."

"Talent, I fear, I am not intrusted with, to neglect or improve; but I can

sincerely say, that I have made great and persevering efforts, during the last five years, to cultivate my natural inclination for drawing, and perhaps, with help, I might be able to succeed so far as to paint miniatures, and to give drawing lessons."

"But is this necessary, my Clara?" cried Leonora. "It is not that I fear failure for you, but do not enter on the fatigues and anxieties of a profession. I have enough for both of us. All I have is yours, if you will share it. Trust to me; do not think of working for money."

"Hear me, Leonora," said Clara, stopping her in the midst of her appeal: "I love you so truly, and you have done so much for me already,—always,—that the home you offer, in your noble generosity, I would accept,—yes, and enjoy all the

more, because you gave it. But I know the uses to which you put your money too well, to suffer you to bestow it on me. Some weeping eye would be left uncomforted, some sufferer be left unfed, some victims unsaved from sacrifice, for every portion of your wealth which I consumed. Money to you is only the means of doing good to others. Encourage me to work, that I may aid you in your offices of love, not become the indolent means of limiting and cramping them."

"I think," said Leonora, without further opposition, "we have reason to be grateful for this event. I think it will conduce to our true happiness. I imagine I can see in it one instance of the use of adversity. We are now free; our course is before us. There is in you, my Clara, no faltering,



no doubt. No one will dare to interfere with us. My brother will protect and help us, and of all living men it is, perhaps, most in his power to help you in the object that you have at heart. From this moment, Clara, we have one home, one object, one child, for whom we will both labour, and whose education shall be our mutual care."

How merciful was the dispensation to poor Clara, which thus opened her return to the hard, cold world through affections so generous and so sweet. It was more than tempering the wind to the shorn lamb: it was creating the conditions which were essential to energy and hope.

## CHAPTER III.

“It seemed as if their youth stood in the distance weeping smiles.”—LUDWIG TIECK.

CLARA had found the letter which produced this result on the breakfast table. The sight of the well-known hand-writing, of the well-known seal awakened strange emotions in her bosom. After the first shock which its contents occasioned, feelings

were aroused which helped her to take a clear view of her real position, and of the true course which it required on her part. "A home provided by him," said she, "a home manifesting his love, and reflecting back on him a portion of its calmness and solace—that I accepted. The home lost—another offered, coupled with conditions that imply mistrust, requiring sacrifices which love ought to be incapable of asking—that I will not accept."

She called Bertha to her and told her that they must go to Leonora's immediately, and that she must prepare herself for a long absence from the cottage. Bertha, affected by the extraordinary emotions of her mother, divined the truth in its spirit, after the usual manner of acute children, without comprehending its

literal details or its causes. This child had several fondly cherished associations with her home, but there was one which seemed suddenly to seize upon her imagination, and to absorb for the moment every other thought; opening the glass door she passed rapidly down into the wood where she was heard singing a wild chant that sounded like a funeral dirge, digging all the while with her little spade at a spot that for some time past had been sacred to her. She soon found the object of which she was in search—a small antique bronze urn, containing the mortal remains of the little bullfinch, which had been laid there a year before. She wiped the mould from the urn, placed it carefully in a basket filled with the softest moss, and covered it with primroses and violets. She then

walked quickly up the steps that led from the wood into the garden ; at this moment the sun emerging from a cloud shone forth with dazzling splendour, the brightness of which Bertha seemed to hail in a rich burst of song with that beautiful Italian air which the dead bird she carried in her hand used to sing. There were in her eyes no tears, in her heart no sorrow, and her voice was that of triumph. She deeply felt the beauty that surrounded her, she lived in it, she was scarcely conscious of anything else, and she seemed to have the assurance that beauty was everywhere, and that go where she may she should find it.

There was indeed, at present, no time for the indulgence of tender regrets. The minutes passed, Clara seemed to be impa-

tient to leave the house, their little packages were soon completed, and within four hours after she had received Lord Ashford's letter, she was in rapid motion away from her tranquil and beautiful home. As this scene of quiet loveliness faded from her view, and she felt that it was vanishing from her sight for ever, no resentment agitated her bosom, no reproach escaped her lips, the bitterness of her grief arose from the thought of his suffering, and she dwelt with agitating, most painful, yet fascinating emotion on the memory of his love.

## CHAPTER IV.

“Oh! Love! thou makest all things, even  
In earth or heaven;  
Finding thy way through prison-bars  
Up to the stars.  
Or true to the Almighty plan,  
That out of dust created man:  
Thou lookest in a grave to see  
Thine Immortality.”

S. F. ADAMS.

WHEN Clara awoke the next morning, still weary with the fatigues and anxieties of the last few days, there was in her room

the heavy, dull, yellow air of a damp, wintry, London morning, and she was conscious of the peculiar taste of London smoke. These sensations, so powerfully in contrast with those produced by the objects on which her eyes usually opened, and particularly with the feeling of refreshment commonly following sleep in the pure and fresh atmosphere of her own home, brought to her view vividly and most painfully the cherished scenes of that dear home, now lost; and then followed the thought of her greater loss, the irrevocable loss of that link, slight as it was, which had been suddenly snapped, in a manner and from causes which, during the remainder of life, must make memory an agonizing sorrow.

From the thought of that sorrow she



resolutely turned, under the conviction that the duty she had undertaken required in her, as the first proof of her fidelity to the future, that she should not voluntarily dwell upon the past. This conscientious exertion was rewarded by success; for the associations which recalled that "agonising sorrow" were banished by trains of thought which led her out of and above herself, to Bertha, to her beloved friends, to the Divine Being, whom it was the habit, favoured, perhaps, by the natural constitution of her mind to conceive of as "Our Father," and whom she devoutly felt to be our Father, pursuing unchangeably His purposes of love and blessing, no less when He blesses by affliction than by happiness.

In the evening, when the three friends

were assembled, and Clara was reclining as usual on the sofa, and Leonora had taken her accustomed seat on a little stool at her side, Leonora said with a radiant face, "I have been very successful to-day."

"You are always successful," replied Dr. Weston, "especially when you have a gentle and loving object to accomplish."

"And my object to-day has been a loving one, and love has favoured my pursuit, and will crown it with his blessing."

Clara looked at her inquiringly, her eye moistened with affectionate thankfulness, for she well knew that this pursuit had some kind of generous relation to herself.

Leonora took the hands of her friend within her own, and kissing her cheek fondly, continued: "It seems as if it had been made on purpose for us; the situation

is good ; it will be equally convenient to us both ; there is just room for both ; it is in Devonshire-street."

"What ?" asked Clara.

"The house that I have taken."

"What house ?"

"The house that is to be our home. Some of the rooms are admirably suited for your purpose of painting, Clara ; and the other apartments will afford to me all the accommodation I desire."

"Clara then will have no excuse for not setting to work immediately," replied Dr. Weston.

"Believe me, I seek no excuse," answered Clara ; "it is the part and privilege of affection to anticipate the wishes of its object, and Leonora has proved by this act, as prompt as it is kind, that she is one of the initiated."

“Worthy to be a master,” said Dr. Weston.

“I should have been but a dull scholar if I had not become so by this time under such a professor,” replied Leonora, smiling and bowing playfully.

“And I, too,” exclaimed Clara, “should have been still duller if, in such a school and with such a professor, I had not learnt the duties as well as the privileges of affection.”

“Dearest Clara,” cried Leonora, her eyes brightening, and fondly pressing the hands she still held in hers, “what proofs have you not lately given of courage and strength, greater even than your affection.”

“No,” replied Clara. “I have given no proof of strength. I have done only what was indispensable, and if I could enable you

to read my heart as I have been obliged to read it, you would know the difficulty, the struggle it has cost me not to fail in my plainest duty."

"Duty so achieved," said Dr. Weston, "is good earnest that it cannot fail, and that it will not always be difficult."

"I am, indeed, very desirous," continued Clara, "to lessen some of the anxiety which you both feel on my account."

"All anxiety about you," replied Leonora, "has ceased on our part ; there was a time when we were most anxious, but your dear physician has saved you body and mind."

"And my dear friend," said Clara, with a look of tenderness which would have repaid Leonora for a year's nursing. "I wish to convince you," she continued, "that

I am able to go through with the life I have begun to-day."

"And the home we will make you shall help you," said Leonora.

"Without your help I should have sunk, and should still sink. Perhaps you do not know that this is my birth-day. I am twenty-five to-day. It is just eleven years since I first saw you both."

Her voice trembled, she paused for a moment, but neither of her friends interrupted her.

"There is one thing," continued she in a voice scarcely audible, "for which I have to bless you. I have never thanked you with my lips, but my heart has never ceased to thank you."

She again paused.

"You have neither of you ever said one

unkind word of him," she resumed; "by that I knew your sympathy, and that I might always open my heart to you."

Her tearful eyes met those of her friends, and though no word was spoken, they felt that this gentle confidence bound them closer to each other than ever.

"I wish to tell you," she resumed, "of the resolution I have formed to-day; the promise I have made to my own heart, the prayer I have offered for help; and I would willingly, if I might do so unpresumingly, hope that the prayer is in some measure answered by the cheerfulness and happiness I feel, far beyond what I could have believed it possible for me ever to experience again."

"One just interpretation of the use and efficacy of prayer," said Dr. Weston, "is,

that oftentimes it is self-answered in the preparedness of mind to which it contributes for realizing the object for which the creature may presume to petition his Creator."

"May we not humbly hope," asked Leonora, "that that is one of the modes in which the Creator vouchsafes to answer the creature, who, however insignificant, he has made capable of lifting his mind to himself, and who can have given such faculties only in the end to fill them with himself?"

"It must be so," answered Dr. Weston, "if prayer be one of the means which He has appointed to prepare and strengthen us for the work which He has given us to do."

"I have never been repelled," said Clara,



“from addressing the Creator in thought, nor even in words on solemn occasions, by the idea of his goodness and my own insignificance. That my mind dictates it, and that my heart receives comfort and strength from it, seems to me sufficient proof that it is not presumptuous, and that the humblest of his disciples may safely follow the example of the great teacher.”

“It is not possible,” answered Dr. Weston, “to address with the feelings of reverence and love the Majesty of Heaven, even in thought, with reference to an ignoble or wicked purpose ; and the highest and best sometimes need all the support that can be derived even from this source.”

“In my own humble course,” said Clara, “I have felt the need of it, and the support to be derived from it ; especially,” she

continued, in a subdued and solemn tone, "in one purpose most dear to my heart."

The friends were struck with her manner, but remained silent.

"You know some of my motives for exertion," she resumed, "but not all of them. I will not conceal from you one which I cherish."

She stopped. A shade, as from an angel's wing, passed over her face.

"Many years ago," she continued, "I heard my physician say to my Leonora these words: 'What a crime has that man to answer for, for crushing *her* to the earth!' These terrible words entered my soul. I believe it was the effort to lessen this weight of guilt on him that made me struggle as I did, not to sink and die at that dreadful time. Certainly, it is one of

my most blessed comforts to think that at this present moment, while I am disobeying his wish, and acting in a manner which he may regard as outraging love, I am labouring to prevent a curse from falling on him. If, instead of allowing it to crush me, I can turn the injury he has done me to my improvement, I may hope not only to take away this guilt from him, but to make that love which must ever have been imperfect here, perfect in heaven. In this manner, I shall, perhaps, make myself worthy of the great love for which we have neither of us been prepared here; and when we meet hereafter, I shall be able to show him what I have done to prove my devotedness to him."

## CHAPTER V.

“We are as distant from the world in spirit,  
If not in place, as though in Crusoe’s Isle.”

LEIGH HUNT.

BUSY were the hands, and light the hearts, that were at work to put the house in order on the day they entered their new abode. Leonora managed to set every one at work, for she considerately judged that this occupation of time would be the best

diversion of painful thought. She herself set the example, with a bright and active look, her very dress suggesting the kind of work to which the day was to be devoted ; for she was enveloped in an apron, out of the pocket of which peeped a hammer ; and old gloves were on her hands, one of which held a number of brass-headed nails.

“ You see,” said she, “ there is plenty to do,—more, I am afraid, than we can get through to-day. Yet stop” she continued, as if a sudden thought had struck her, “ before we set seriously to work, there is something I wish to show you.”

She then whispered to Bertha, who answered her with an arch smile ; and joining hands, they walked forward, and telling Clara to follow, they led the way,

with mock ceremony and state, up-stairs to the drawing-room.

Susan, with her well-known, gentle smile, was already at the door, and threw it open as they entered.

Clara's eyes filled with tears, as they rapidly glanced round the room, and hiding her head in the bosom of her friend, she said :

“Dearest Leonora! Then, you and Bertha have already been here.”

“Yes,” said Leonora, with a countenance radiant with the joy of an accomplished purpose ; “here is your painting-room.”

The light fell brightly from the upper part of the middle window across the room. The walls were dark crimson, a quiet grey drugget covered the floor, and in the centre of the light stood a large, steady

table, with a red cloth, on which were placed a handsome paint-box, a large glass for water, and a drawing-desk. In the middle of the floor was a raised throne, for sitters ; and on it a large, old-fashioned, carved-wood chair, with crimson velvet cushions. An easel, some beautiful plaster casts, a portfolio of prints, a small book-case, containing a few works on art, completed the furniture of the room. There was nothing costly in it, nothing even handsome, except the arm-chair and the paint-box, which, together with the prints and books, were Leonora's gifts ; but everything had been arranged by a graceful hand, and suggested that it was a place devoted to an intellectual pursuit ; while, in Clara's heart, it called up emotions, almost too strong to bear, of love, gratitude, and energetic devo-

tion to duty. She could not speak ; she only kissed her friend's hand, and fervently kissed Bertha, as if to record with both a promise to do her part strongly and well. She then sat down at her table, and, for the first time, seemed to realize the work before her. At that moment, a profound feeling of fear, at the task which she had undertaken, took possession of her imagination. Leonora, who instantly perceived what was passing in her mind, hurried her away, first to see the little back room, which was arranged with a simple elegance as an ante-room, and then to finish the preparations down-stairs.

“ Only see,” cried she, as she ran on before into the dining-room, “ what we have to do, and Dr. Weston is coming to dinner at six.”



Wonderful indeed was the confusion of the room, made up as is common in the small houses in London, of two rooms with folding doors between ; no carpet down, no curtains up ; a whole dinner-service of green and white china scattered about on the floor, with various articles of glass and other pieces of furniture, which had just been brought in and set down ; yet Leonora's words, " this is to be our sitting-room," sounded so cheerfully in Clara's ears, that she forgot her fatigue, and began actively to help. Bertha too assisted, for she liked to help Leonora, whose strong and graceful ways of doing everything charmed her.

By the help of a carpenter, the curtains, which had been cut out and made under Leonora's own directions, were soon put up. Though of cheap materials they looked

elegant. By this time Susan had cleared and swept the floor and the carpet was brought in, which was also very inexpensive, but it harmonized well with the green curtains, and by the aid of a bright fire gave a look of comfort to the room, which was delightful. A round table laid for dinner, some chairs, a few small tables, a sofa, and a plaster column, such as Italian boys carry about, and holding a bust of Baillie's Eve, placed in one corner, completed the furniture of the room. They had turned away after placing it there, and were busied in something else, when the kind of chant which Bertha was used to send forth when engaged in some favourite occupation making them turn round, they saw the child arranging an ivy wreath round the pedestal, which she soon made to hang

gracefully as if it grew there. She then went softly for the basket which she had carried in her own hand all the way from the cottage to town, and carefully taking from its bed of fern and moss the precious urn, she placed it, half hid among the ivy leaves, in front of the bust. All this was done quickly, and, as if shunning observation, no word was therefore addressed to her from the two hearts that watched her. She then came forward, and showered on the table her treasures of primroses, snow-drops, violets, and hepaticas. A glass of clear water was quickly brought, and a beautiful middle ornament for the dinner-table was arranged. There was now only to set in order their own dress as well as such hard workers could do, and they had scarcely got down stairs, and congratulated each other on the

excellent appearance of the room, when the welcome sound of Dr. Weston's knock was heard. His surprise and delight at the brightness, comfort, and elegance which he found already established completed their pleasure. Seldom has a happier party sat down to dinner. Peace and joy, almost too great for words, filled the hearts round that little table. Anxious cares and regretful thoughts never once intruded; sometimes there was a long silence, in which more was felt than eloquence could speak, interrupted only by Bertha's soft and measured breathing, for she had fallen asleep by their side on the sofa, and the calm beauty of her face, seemed to reflect the tranquil happiness of the three friends.

## CHAPTER VI.

“Life is real, life is earnest.”—LONGFELLOW.

“Then, in that strange dream, how we clutch at shadows, as if they were substances, and sleep deepest, while fancying ourselves most awake!”—

CARLYLE.

DR. WESTON had given instructions to Clara, in that part of anatomy which interests the painter, and had thus secured her against committing any material error in drawing, but she was ignorant of the

art of miniature painting, which at that time was in a much lower state than it is at present, and was practised, with a few eminent exceptions, only by inferior artists. He could not find any to give lessons to his young friend with whom he was satisfied, but he at length fixed on Mr. Esdaile, who had acquired some celebrity, and to whom he introduced Clara.

It was not the custom in those days for the younger artists to wear moustaches and imperials, blouses and open collars, but the same desire prevailed to be taken for foreigners, which was then manifested under a different disguise. The long war having made the country familiar with military costumes of all kinds, foreign as well as native, it was the costume of the soldier that was then to be seen, as denoting the

peaceful profession of an artist ; that is, braided and frogged military frock coats, lined and trimmed with as much fur or black lamb skin as could be afforded, Hessian boots, and stiff stocks.

It was thus adorned that the good natured, comfortable, fat, little cockney figure of Mr. Esdaile presented itself before Clara, when she called to arrange about the hours of her future lessons. She found his table ostentatiously laid out with specimens of his own miniatures of various sizes, all neatly and carefully framed. These he exhibited, one after another, to the timid and wondering Clara, with an air of self-satisfaction, which, without words, sufficiently said, " Look at this work of art ! but, indeed, it is not to be expected that you should be yet able to appreciate its merit."

A kind of confusion and giddiness came over Clara as she gazed on these productions, quite hopeless of ever succeeding in painting such smooth backgrounds and delicate complexions, and lost in wonder at the skill and patience displayed in the imitation of the lace, silk, and velvet dresses, to say nothing of the China jars and carved wood chairs, and astonished above all at the very small hands and feet that belonged to the sitters of those days.

With a feeling of the most bashful hesitation she opened her own portfolio of drawing, that her master might see the sort of instruction she was most in need of, who on his part turned them over with ill-concealed contempt. Commenting on the want of drawing, a fault which certainly did not belong to them; the absence of "keeping," the



unskilful way in which they were “put together,” and the imperfection of the “tools” she had “handled;” but without in the least observing their genius and feeling.

In the space of half-an-hour they had completely succeeded in mutually imposing on each other; she, all humility, ashamed even to show the drawings which her good taste told her were full of faults, to one whom she believed to be an accomplished artist, and whose mode of painting she felt it a duty to endeavour to imitate; while he, entirely self-satisfied, or rather absorbed in the admiration of his own productions, attributed her diffidence to the conscious want of talent and skill.

The fact was, that in all which he was capable of doing she was wholly deficient, and that the sole merit of her drawings con-

sisted in the taste and feeling they indicated, which he was unable even to comprehend. Had he been a master of his art he would at once have discovered her genius, and never allowed himself to interfere with any thing that emanated from it, but would have satisfied himself with teaching her the technicalities of the art, and putting her in the way of learning how, in the most correct and effective manner, to give expression to her own conception and feelings. But instead of this, he began, in his conceit, by overturning all that he could not comprehend, endeavouring to replace it by his own poor and barren taste, repeating to her over and over again, "We must all draw," "There is nothing like nature," and such obvious trite and useful common places.

Clara, though completely dispirited, for it

seemed to her that she should never be able to emulate Mr. Esdaile's powers, immediately set herself sedulously to work under his direction, to copy some of his miniatures, imitating his style as carefully and faithfully as possible, and wholly obliterating her own.

She was obliged to work hard, for Dr. Weston had a friend who was impatient to take her first sitting. Clara undertook the task long before she thought she was properly prepared for it, yet when once engaged in her work, she was surprised at feeling so little nervous on the occasion. Her real genius for the art to which circumstances had led her to devote herself, made the cultivation of it an intense pleasure to her, and the moment she took the pencil in her hand, she became absorbed in what she was about,

and forgot everything else. She had succeeded, as she thought, wonderfully, when her master entered, and with a kind patronizing air, seating himself in her place, altered at once the ladylike and graceful position of the figure into one more after his own taste, and by a few masterly touches vulgarized the whole picture. Clara felt the colour rush into her cheek, and with difficulty suppressed an exclamation of dismay. She succeeded, however, in bringing herself to believe that of course her master knew best ; acceded to all he advised, and submitted with the most exemplary humility to have her picture spoiled. The picture was at last so completely moulded into the fashion and style of her master, that he was really pleased with it, and something of a feeling of pride in so promising

and docile a pupil, was at the bottom of the bad advice he now gave ; which was that she should finish a picture for the exhibition, "it being," he said "highly important that she should make her name known as an exhibitor as soon as possible."

This was a piece of advice to which Clara submitted with a worse grace than she had done to the spoiling of her picture. She shrank from bringing her name before the public so soon ; the thought of it was extremely painful to her, yet she considered that sooner or later it must be done, and till it was done no success could attend her efforts to become independent. She, therefore, strove to conquer her repugnance, and occupied herself early and late with her picture. Mr. Esdaile would have had only this one, which was painted after

his own style, sent in, but Dr. Weston and Leonora prevailed on her to accompany it with another more capable of showing her true feeling and power. The one chosen was a small fancy picture of an angel which she had designed from little Bertha. It was full of beauty, though with some faults of drawing and composition, and it was altogether irregularly coloured and executed.

Her success would have been better promoted [if she had waited till another year's study and practice had enabled her to send more perfect works, and thus to avoid that injury which an artist's name always suffers by being connected with half knowledge, and crude and imperfect execution ; but her master advised it, and her friends were not sufficiently informed on

the subject to pursue the right course. The pictures were therefore framed and glazed, and on the first Monday in April were conveyed to Somerset House by Mr. Esdaile, with Clara's name and address attached to them, there to await the verdict of the authorized judges appointed by the Royal Academy as to whether they were to be accepted for exhibition, or rejected among the hundreds which yearly suffer that fate.

Clara had worked so hard to finish her pictures in the best manner which her unpractised hand enabled her to do, that it was not till some days had passed that she began to feel that nervous anxiety which all young artists have to experience as to the rejection or acceptance of their first works. She was advised, however, not to

send to inquire about the fate of her own, but to await the result in silence ; and not receiving in the usual form a notice to remove her pictures, she concluded that they had found a place.

On the important first Monday in May, a group of about fifty persons, which soon increased to upwards of a hundred, had collected around the door of the Royal Academy, at Somerset House, among whom stood Leonora, holding little Bertha close to her ; she saw, as she looked about her, walking up and down, on the outskirts of the crowd, a figure which attracted her attention ; it was some years since she had seen him ; he stooped, and walked with a less confident and steady step ; he had grown much thinner, and had lost his youthful air, but she could not mistake him ;



it was Lord Ashford. She turned away instantly, and managed that her face should not be seen. She had scarcely time to conjecture why he was there, when the doors opened, and the crowd began to press in. She was borne along with it, and for ten minutes there was nothing but confusion and hurry ; then the admission money being paid, and the tickets delivered, she found herself, with her little charge, in the ample lobby of the Royal Academy, which seemed nearly empty, for the collection of persons, who looked many when they were pressing round the door, were lost in the space within, and as they nearly all hurried up-stairs to the great room, she and Bertha had the miniatures almost entirely to themselves.

Leonora now forgot everything but Clara

and her miniature. She cast her eyes over the dazzling collection before her, but in vain ; she could not see it. It could not be there ; she had looked high and low, in good lights and bad lights, all in vain. The pictures began to swim before her eyes, and her head became giddy, when Bertha cried, “ There it is ! ” and running towards it, pointed it out. It looked quite as well as Leonora expected, and though in an inferior place, was yet creditably hung for the work of a young exhibitor.

Comforting herself with the thought that her dear Clara would derive more profit from the study of the works around her than she had done by the lessons of her master, she yielded to Bertha’s impatience to find the “ Angel ” next, and they went up-stairs together. They looked through

the small rooms without finding it, and then went into the Great Room; and, faithful to her anxiety for her friend, Leonora did not stop before any of the master-pieces on the walls, but her eyes searched high and low for the little Angel.

“Look high, darling,” said she to Bertha, “high up. They have most likely hung it near the ceiling.”

Still they searched in vain, and now they began to look very low down, and to walk all round, examining every small picture.

Suddenly Leonora stopped, and held Bertha tightly by the hand, for they had both seen it at the same moment, and the little girl was about to spring forward to it.

“Stop, my own child, let the gentleman

who is before it look at it quietly, and alone."

It was hung next the floor, and Lord Ashford was kneeling before it, and looking closely at it.

While speaking, Leonora had drawn little Bertha behind an angle of the wall, whence she earnestly watched Lord Ashford, while the unconscious child looked inquiringly in her eyes, wondering why she trembled. Lord Ashford presently rose, and walked slowly towards the door. He was very pale, and a large tear was on his cheek. He kept his face turned close to the pictures as he moved towards the door, through which he passed quickly, and then hurried down the stairs.

Surprised, and deeply affected, Leonora yielded passively to Bertha's hand, which

now drew her towards the picture ; but she looked at it without being able to see it, or to think of anything but the emotion she had just witnessed.

“ He feels, then,” she thought ; “ he feels deeply. He has come here expressly to see these works of her hand ; he watched the crowd to make himself sure that she was not here. Yes, he suffers ; he is unhappy.”

“ Bertha, dearest,” she said aloud, “ let us go home now, and tell mamma about the pictures. We will come back another day, very soon, and look at all the rest ; but I want to get back to her now.”

Much as Bertha was attracted by the brightness and beauty around her, she obeyed immediately, and they were soon on their way homewards, Leonora’s thoughts

profoundly absorbed in Lord Ashford, and her heart full of pity.

“What a bondage,” thought she, “what a cruel slavery, is that which the world imposes on its victims. Here is a love, real, deep, and lasting, given up for an empty shadow. The genius, beauty, and sweetness, over the loss of which his heart now bemoans itself, might have been his, to brighten his path through life, and he preferred the nothingness he has got.”

As they drew near Devonshire Street, her thoughts turned to Clara. Should she tell her of what she had seen? To what end should she do so? It formed the peculiar cruelty of Clara’s lot that nothing could be done to soften it. It was a case for which there was no help or hope. Still it must add to the sorrow of her mind to

think of him as hard, cold, and unworthy ; better unhappy than that. The conflict and doubt ended in a resolution to ask advice of Doctor Weston before saying anything, and with this decision, she knocked at the door.

## CHAPTER VII.

“Now in every craft there is a perfect excellency, which may be better known in a man’s mind, than followed in a man’s deed.”—ROGER ASCHAM.

IN consequence of the unexpected lateness of the hour before the doors of the Academy opened, it was not till long after she had been looked for by Clara that Leonora returned to Devonshire Street. From eleven o’clock, when she had thought it possible that her friend might return,



till two, the anxious artist had wandered up and down the room, and from window to window till she had worked herself up to a high degree of excitement. But now, when at last she heard the well-known knock, and through the open window caught the sound of Bertha's voice, Clara was too much agitated to run to the door, or even to rise from the chair into which she had thrown herself, prepared to hear that after all the pictures were rejected. Leonora did not stop to answer Susan's anxious inquiries, but ran up-stairs, calling out "They are both safe,—they are as well, they are even better placed than we could have hoped for." A momentary beam of joy passed over Clara's face. "But how do they look? Tell me whereabouts they are? Do they attract any attention?"

How ungrateful human nature is ! A few minutes ago, Clara, in her despondence, had wondered how she could be so presumptuous as to hope that pictures sent by her inexperienced hand could find a place among those of the great artists whose names sounded so remotely imposing and grand to her imagination ; but now, no sooner was she assured that they were really hung up on the walls of the Academy, and in places to satisfy even her devoted friend, than she felt almost inclined to quarrel even with that dear friend because, in reply to her eager and many questionings, it came out that the pictures looked smaller than probably Clara would expect to see them, and neither so clear and bright, nor so highly finished as those of Mrs. Robertson, Newton, or Ross.

Leonora said kindly, "of course we could not expect it ; it would be impossible that you should paint as well as they, but you will, I hope and believe, in time." Clara knew that this was true, but she felt disappointed and annoyed, for she had thought that Leonora would have been quite eloquent about them, but instead of eloquence she found coldness, and she could hardly help giving expression to this vexed feeling ; no word of complaint, however, escaped her lips, though it was with the utmost difficulty that she exercised this self-control.

To a certain extent this dissatisfied mood of mind lasted all day, and she was really hurt when Leonora talked in exactly the same moderate tone to Dr. Weston, who called in the evening to hear the result of

this first effort. Clara was further secretly annoyed by the unconscious Bertha, who could not be prevailed on to say a word about her mother's pictures, except, "Yes, she had seen them;" while she was in ecstasies when she described two or three others which had caught her eye.

Dr. Weston engaged to take Clara to the Academy himself the next morning at nine o'clock, and Clara was rejoiced that she should now be able to see and judge for herself.

On arriving at the Academy she had first to receive her ticket of admission for the season and her catalogue; there was a momentary excitement in this, not unmixed with a feeling of gratification. She was about to realize the accomplishment of one great object of her life; and it was

not without a feeling of pride, and even triumph, that she placed her trembling hand within her friend's arm as they walked forward into the dismal apartment where both Sculpture and Miniatures used to be huddled together in the rooms in Somerset House. She had been to the Exhibition frequently in former years and knew the exact places where her own portrait ought to be, but she could not find it,—she looked again and again. “It cannot possibly be that Leonora meant it was here,” thought poor Clara, as turning sick and giddy, she looked hurriedly down a part of the wall which was only half lighted by the window—a dismal strip of wall, or rather shutter, on each side of the window, which young artists knew in those days but too well as a place to be dreaded ;

bearing, indeed, some affinity to the Octagon Room of the National Gallery. There, in that very place it was, and very low down besides, and looking so small, so black, so coarse, that poor Clara, who had stooped down to look at it, nearly sunk on the floor. Dr. Weston was scarcely less disconcerted, but he spoke cheeringly to her, and endeavoured to make her forget herself by directing her attention to some really beautiful miniatures, painted by the highest masters of the art of that day; observing to her that, in all probability, the most distinguished of these had begun at as low a point as herself. That innate love of art which belongs to every true genius soon engaged her in the earnest study of those finished productions, and when from these her thoughts returned to her own,

she found that her first feeling of determination never to attempt to paint again was already gone.

She was not a little surprised to find that the paintings of her master, Mr. Esdaile, which, as far as regarded execution, she had thought the perfection of art, when she saw them in his own painting room previously to their being sent to the Exhibition, were placed not much better than her own, and looked nearly as small and insignificant, though not quite as rough and dingy.

On leaving this room of disappointment they went up-stairs, where Clara breathed more freely. Leonora had so correctly described the part of the room where her angel was placed, that she had no difficulty in finding her, but there was nothing in her

position, or the effect she produced, to compensate her for the mortification she had found on the window shutter of the room below. It was, therefore, not until after some time, and many internal struggles, that she found herself capable of attending to the more successful paintings around her. Gradually, however, she began to feel the real beauty of some of them, and the pictures of Wilkie, Mulready, Hilton, Turner, Etty, Eastlake, Newton, and some others, afforded her sincere delight. The Holy Family of Eastlake attracted her particularly; and as she passed again and again from one of her favourite paintings to another, the admiration she felt beamed out unconsciously in her sensitive and expressive countenance. Dr. Weston gazed on her with secret and entire satisfaction, justly deeming that the



bitterness of her disappointment was compensated by the proof which, unknown to herself, she was thus giving of her true vocation for the art she had chosen.

The young artist who, in the moment of bitter disappointment at the failure of his first effort, which he had secretly regarded with elated satisfaction, can feel hope and pleasure revive in his heart, on the contemplation of the beauty and perfection displayed in the production of a great master, need never despair of achieving success. The spark of holy fire is within him, and will some day shine out purely and brightly.

When they descended the stairs to leave the Academy, Clara gently drew Dr. Weston again towards the miniature-room, saying, "I must look at it once more, it was the first astonishment that distressed me."

But this courage and strength were to a certain extent evanescent. When alone with Leonora, there were several secret struggles in her bosom to prevent the return of the feelings of despair, and at night her sleep was disturbed by dreams of her unsatisfactory paintings presenting themselves to her imagination in all sorts of tormenting ways.

Still, with the returning morning, she sat down quietly to her work of study and practice, persevering steadily day by day, although as regarded the prospect of present success, in complete hopelessness ; for, as to any sitters coming to her after the sight of her horrible painting on the window-shutter at Somerset House, that of course she gave up as impossible. Too happy should she feel, if the lady whose picture she had begun, sister to the original of the disgraced

performance, had not been frightened away from her by the sight.

Clara had now passed through the first trial of an artist's life, out of which many come with extinguished heart and hope; but she had been schooled in hard lessons of disappointment, and after those which she had already mastered, this was capable of producing only a temporary shock. Day after day she returned to the Academy as early as the doors were open, and there she remained in study until the crowd of visitors caused her to withdraw.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“ Of outward show,  
Elaborate, of inward less exact.”

MILTON.

“ WHAT a privilege it is,” said Clara, one evening as the three friends were seated together, after having spent the morning at an exhibition of the old masters, “ what a privilege it is to be able to hold communion with the finest part of the fine minds, that conceived and executed these noble works.”

“ Are you impressed in the same way,” asked Dr. Weston, “ by the works of the old masters and the pictures of modern artists?”

“ On the contrary,” replied Clara ;” at the Royal Academy I feel oppressed and hopeless ; in the presence of the old masters I forget myself.”

“ Then your true sympathy is with these grand workers ?”

“ You will neither of you suspect me of not perceiving my own insignificance with reference to art, but when I am contemplating these great works, I forget that I cannot paint ; that I know not even how to set about a picture. I am conscious only of the deep emotion with which they impress me, a feeling which I think approaches to adoration.”

“ Yet this feeling does not depress you by seeming to place you at an immeasurable distance from them.”

“ The emotion of adoration is itself elevating, and the contemplation even of the Deity, whose distance from us is infinite, does not depress us, nor prevent us from endeavouring to imitate what in Him is imitable by creatures of such limited and narrow capacities. Something in the same way I feel when reverently studying the works of these great masters, as if their spirits welcomed me in my insignificance to the divine kingdom of art.”

“ But how is it that you feel more humbled by works, which you regard with less reverence ?”

“ I do not feel more humbled, but more hopeless. Without supposing that I am

capable of approaching the excellence of the one, I do not altogether despair of being able to paint *in their spirit*, and with their aim ; but the conceptions of the other appear to me to be poor, while the means they take to accomplish their object, or their mode of painting, I feel and know that I never can imitate with success."

"Have you, then, forgotten the Holy Family, by Eastlake, or those pictures by Etty, which you said brought you into the presence of the enchanted knights of the Faery Queen?"

"So far from it, I have copied Eastlake's picture from memory ; and some of Etty's poems appear to me to be conceived, and even executed, in the true spirit of the old masters."

“And Turner’s beautiful Mysteries, mamma!” said little Bertha.

“Yes ; I admit that there are still present with us minds that appear to me to be worthy to be regarded as kindred spirits of the mighty dead.”

“You must remember,” said Dr. Weston, “that the pictures we have just visited are collected, not from one city, but from the studios of the finest masters of several countries, and are the result of the labour of many ages, and of the labour of such ages directed by the highest genius.”

“And of the highest genius,” said Leonora, “fostered by powerful patrons, whose taste was sufficiently cultivated to appreciate fully the genius they fostered.”

“Our English School,” continued Dr. Weston, “has only had a few years of



existence, and no patrons; that is, patrons qualified by their true comprehension and love of art to choose and direct subjects worthy of a divine art."

"Is not this chiefly because the school is in its infancy?" inquired Leonora. "I am unwilling to believe there is in England no original genius capable of appreciating and selecting great works of art, if they were produced."

"There is all the proof of it that can be derived from appearances," said Clara, "from the fine collection we have this day seen, to say nothing of the numerous private collections, sufficiently testifying that the English can understand high art."

"When you come, however, to consider the real truth," replied Dr. Weston, "it turns out that there is less evidence of this than

there seems to be at first view; for these fine collections are seldom chosen by their possessors. They are valued not exactly as possessions, but as possessions that confer distinction, just as some of our aristocracy purchase rare old books, and others costly and antique jewels. It does not necessarily follow, therefore, that the owners of these beautiful paintings know anything of their real worth."

"There is one excellence in these old pictures," said Leonora, "which does not require any very refined or exalted taste to comprehend,—the wonderful richness and splendor of their colouring."

"All can feel this," replied Dr. Weston, "but few comprehend why they feel it. It is the fashion just now to say that the English School is remarkable for the beauty

of its colouring. Although I am no artist, I disprove this from the following fact: The meanest subject painted by any of the Dutch or Flemish masters becomes instantly transformed into a stud of jewels, which adorns and lights up the most elegant room; while scarcely any English master, except, perhaps, Etty and Mulready, and one or two others, ever painted a picture that does not look, as far as the general effect goes, mean, even in a common room; while a collection of English pictures gives the depressing effect which Clara describes herself as feeling at the Academy."

"No doubt it is for this reason," said Leonora, "that rich people prefer old paintings, however mean the subject, to the best paintings of the English masters?"

"Yes; and if they cannot afford to buy

originals, they endeavour to obtain their object by copies. But they do not succeed; for when the composition lines, the lights and shadows, and the colours—at least the colours that go by the same names—are imitated, the colours themselves being unattainable, or the mode of using them like the ancient masters not attained; the copy comes out opaque, instead of being clear and transparent, and, consequently, will not light up their rooms.”

“In the English mode of painting,” said Clara, “there is a clever sketchiness, a parade of carelessness, which I do not admire,—perhaps because I feel that it is wholly unattainable by myself; and yet I believe my real objection to it is that it suggests to me the idea of painting in a kind of sacrilegious spirit.”

“You are quite right,” said Dr. Weston ;  
“it is as if all the pictures wore their hats  
cocked on one side.”

“What is the date of this new style of  
painting ?” asked Leonora.

“It is quite a new feature in art,”  
replied Dr. Weston, “and it is one belong-  
ing exclusively to England ; the cleverness  
of the mere manipulation is part of the  
English nature, I had almost said genius,  
but I believe the correct word for it is  
ability, which makes us the best locksmiths  
mechanics, and machinists of the world ;  
but with this remarkable difference, that  
while the care, the pains, and skill bestowed  
on mechanical productions enhance their  
value, one great excellence in the painter  
is a light and skilful touch, which seems  
to accomplish everything by a stroke, and

which at least hides all effort. This power the English artist cultivates and affects beyond all others."

"If this absence of apparent effort," said Clara, "suggested the idea that the work was like a creation of nature, it would be truly beautiful, but instead of this it gives to me a suggestion of irreverence, and is therefore painful to me."

"The effect must be bad on the pictures themselves, and still more on the artists, for the conceit of cleverness cannot exist in the same mind with true genius."

"No," replied Clara, "genius comes to those who worship her in spirit and in truth, who labour for her, who give up all for her; but from the conceited and irreverent she flies."

"There is a great difficulty in producing

grand pictures in the present state of public feeling and taste," observed Dr. Weston, "because great artists are seldom rich, and are, therefore, unable to command the requisite capital and time. To paint great pictures there should be ease of body and mind, freedom from anxiety about the means of subsistence, ability to compass the expenses of painting, which in themselves are heavy, and above all sympathy of friends and admirers to encourage and cheer the workers through their labours, for I do not believe that one of the pictures we have been looking at to-day has been painted without long hours of toil and care."

"As to the mere mechanical labour required to put the paint on the canvas or panel," said Clara, "I do not doubt they

readily employed as much as was necessary to carry out their poetical intentions, but their true labour was in perfecting the intention, in arranging the composition, in studying the drawing, and in making the most effective arrangement of light and shade."

"I would not despise excellence in the mere handling," continued Dr. Weston, "in which the English student is said to have attained eminence, but to rest in this appears to me to be satisfied with the means without obtaining the end. What is really grand when you have acquired the art of putting bad paints skilfully on canvas, arranged so as to produce opaque instead of clear effects, with no result of grand light and shade, no breadth or brilliancy, no knowledge of drawing, no pre-



cision of purpose, and with a professed contempt of poetry and sublimity?"

"The great evil," said Clara," "is that there are no masters to lead their pupils up to these grander heights, whether it be grandeur of subject or of outline and colour."

"In the glorious days of art," replied Dr. Weston, "it was not thus. The student, when he had gone through the several grades of his pupilage, did not then immediately set up for himself as a master, and pursue his own independent course; there was then no demand for small masters, nor the wares they produce. He who was incapable of executing works for the churches and for the palaces of the magnificent patrons of those days sought employment as an assistant, if talented

and promising, under the name of a pupil, in the studio of some great master. Here he was employed in executing the designs of the master under his immediate direction, and in this manner all the talent possessed by the pupil acquired development and guidance ; while for the abortions, the progeny of mean conception and vicious taste, there was no market, no means even of existence. The result was that the grand painters always had at their command abundance of assistants, the very employment of whom prevented the production of bad paintings, which disgrace the name of art and vitiate the taste of the public."

## CHAPTER IX.

“We have the post of giving light to the common herd, and therefore, high-born as we are, are we now in the kitchen.

“Not a single hearth or fire-place in the town, but they knew what was being cooked there. Oh! how interesting it was!

“I think it highly unbecoming,” cried the tea-kettle, “that this strange bird should be listened to. I will let the coal-box judge.”

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN.

THE impatience and irritability that Lord Ashford had been unable to control, on the evening when Sir Frederick Buckton had

offended him, by alluding to the meeting with him and Clara on horseback, and then by boasting of his impudent intrusion into her garden at Woodlands, had not passed unobserved by the object of it, and he resolved to find an opportunity of repaying his Lordship, if possible, in full. In the hope of discovering some means for the accomplishment of this purpose, he revisited his friends at Woodlands Hall, and when there, lost no time in prowling about the cottage.

Finding to his great vexation that its late inmate was gone, he made inquiry in the neighbourhood to discover her present place of abode. All his search, however, was in vain. No one could give him any information. The gardener and his wife had removed to a more advantageous situation ;

the furniture was gone, and nothing remained but the bare walls to tell him that his intentions in this quarter were frustrated. He next busied himself with persevering tenacity in asking questions about Mrs. Merton, in the society of Woodlands Hall, always contriving to leave a blot on her fame by mysterious inuendos whenever he mentioned her name. In this manner, he thoroughly ruined her reputation among his own circle of acquaintance in the neighbourhood, without throwing a single positive aspersion upon her, being, indeed, wholly unable to do so, for want of knowing what to lay to her charge; so easy is it to inflict irreparable injury on a woman without the burden of telling one actual lie. When he had accomplished this worthy purpose, he would probably soon have forgotten the

object of his malice, had it not been for the ill-temper of Lord Ashford, whom all Mrs. Grey's persuasions on the subject could not soothe, and who, although Sir Frederick was known to be about to return to the continent, insulted this meddling fool by shutting his doors against him, and thus established an open breach between them.

The vindictive feeling now rooted in Sir Frederick's mind, vented itself for some time only, in the repetition of a capital story, which he managed to make out of what he knew, or surmised as to Mrs. Merton, for the amusement of his own acquaintances and Lord Ashford's enemies, both being very numerous.

Among these enemies might be ranked Mrs. Dalton, who, with a tongue ever keen and bitter, and to whom scandal was a

delight, had a peculiar relish for any thing which aimed at annoying her noble brother-in-law, towards whom it is scarcely too strong an expression to say, she felt hatred. She feared his clear, clever, penetrating eye, and she quailed under his bitter, unsparing rebukes, yet, the good cheer and good company at his house rendered her able to endure them ; and she even, often blunted her satire and fettered her tongue, rather than be debarred from their attendant advantages. It not unfrequently occurred, however, that her visits were curtailed by some outbreak on her part, which made it impossible for Lord Ashford to tolerate her presence, and brought on a quarrel, which obliged her to retreat to her own house, where she remained, till a wish for the superior luxuries of Grosvenor-square induced her to offer an apology.

This was generally received at first with bad grace, and seldom was a reconciliation effected without humiliating altercations between the contending parties. Indeed, it was only Lord Ashford's unwillingness to let the world know these unbecoming quarrels, that made him accept her confessions at all.

No one ever acknowledges, even in his most private thoughts, that his cause for disliking another, is the fact of that other's clear sightedness having penetrated his own character and discovered its defects and faults. On the contrary, a fictitious object of disapprobation is always raised up and magnified according to the amount of dislike which has to be heaped upon it. Thus it was that Mrs. Dalton persuaded herself that the animosity which she felt against her brother-in-law, was solely owing to the



slights which she observed in his conduct towards her sister, and she fancied that it was sisterly affection, which prompted her ceaseless scrutiny into his behaviour at all times, more especially with regard to other women. But hitherto, this considerate watchfulness had met with no reward. Lady Ashford had invariably discouraged and disapproved of it, never permitting a disrespectful word about her husband to be uttered in her presence. More than once, she had reproved Mrs. Dalton severely for presuming to attempt insinuations against him ; and when this inveterate retailer of scandal came to her armed with Sir Frederick Buckton's account of having met Lord Ashford riding with a lady near Richmond, on the morning of the accident, and proceeded, open-mouthed, to display the palpable certainty that this lady could be no

other than the Mrs. Merton, whom they had all considered as a stranger to him, no less than to them; the whole edifice of facts and probabilities so ingeniously built up was demolished, at once, by Lady Ashford's quiet reply. "Lord Ashford," she said, "had himself told her of his meeting Mrs. Morton on horseback that morning, and had informed her of the death of Mr. Merton, who had been an associate of his in early youth." Mrs. Dalton, who was silenced for the time, felt satisfied, nevertheless, that there was something not yet known at the bottom of Lord Ashford's rage at Sir Frederick's allusion to the matter. She and the baronet being inexhaustible hunters of reputations, were not to be foiled in pursuit of so rich a prey. They had gossipped over this subject again and again, never failing to comfort one another with the assurance that

“more would be heard of it yet.” Their anticipations were verified by an accidental circumstance which occurred at this very time.

It is almost forgotten now, but it is nevertheless true, that twenty years ago no respectable woman could walk along the streets of London without being liable to meet with insult, so general was the habit of thinking a solitary woman—unless, indeed, she happened to be very old and ugly—fair game for annoyance. It was an aggravation of this evil, that it met with no sympathy. Any one who had been subject to it, would be nearly sure, if she were weak enough to complain to her husband or brother afterwards, to receive a reproof, and the comfortable assurance that it was “her own fault for walking about by herself.” At that time, therefore, no woman who could avoid it, or

who could command any sort of escort, ever thought of going out unprotected. All women were consequently shut out, not merely from necessary air and exercise, but from many sources of amusement and mental advancement, from which a better state of street morality, at least, has now ceased to exclude them ; but then, as the women who ventured out alone were comparatively few, they were] for that very reason the more remarkable.

The improvement that has taken place in this matter is, no doubt, partly owing to the institution of the new police, but it is also to be attributed, in great measure, to the introduction of omnibuses, which have made the facility of moving about so great, that women of the middle class have burst through the impediments that confined them, in order to have their share in this great advantage.

It is true the first women who had the temerity to brave the adventure, paid somewhat dearly for it. Each of them will well remember that the cost to her of these most uncomfortable comforts was, at first, the annoyance of finding the man who sat next her press against her in an impudently familiar manner ; perhaps put his arm round her waist, stare into her face, thrust his elbow into her lap, or even seat himself there. These pleasantries, however, have been quietly and quickly stopped. The conductors having an interest in rendering their carriages available for all, it has been found necessary only to make an appeal to them to put an end to the annoyance. No man, even the most brutal, could brave an open exposure of his conduct. It was the duty of the conductor to protect every passenger from inconvenience and insult, and perhaps

no instance ever occurred in which, on an appeal being made to him, his interference was not strengthened and made irresistible by the indignant reprobation of the greater number of the passengers who chanced to be present. The result is, that women are now as sure of being able to command their fair proportion of room, and to be as unmolested in an omnibus, as if they belonged to the sex whose superior physical strength had formerly conferred on it the power and privilege of offering insult with impunity. The habit thus formed of treating women with respect, has had a civilizing influence on the manners and conduct of men of all ranks, and in this respect we owe more to the omnibus than to the schoolmaster. It is still too common to see men spread out their knees, and make their bodies occupy all the space they can possibly get them to fill, the

moment they observe a coming inmate on the step ; but this is now rarely done, if the new inmate be a woman ; on the contrary, the helping hand is generally held out to her, and room is quickly made for her, and this is one gratifying evidence of increasing refinement among our countrymen.

Gradually this habit of treating women respectfully has spread throughout all the public thoroughfares, so that now a footman, cane in hand, following a lady like a shadow, has become an unnecessary appendage, except as a mark of distinction or of fashion, and the necessity of securing walking brothers and friends a needless embarrassment, however young the fair pedestrian may be, except in cases of peculiarly gay dress or giddy conduct. No woman, in the present day, who has a quiet and self-possessed demeanor, and who is dressed in a style of

respectability and good taste suited to her station in life, need entertain fear in walking alone, any more than did that one heroic-hearted fair one who, wearing gems "rich and rare," determined to show her countrywomen that with purity and high faith in human goodness, the loveliest and most richly attired could pass solitary and unharmed from one end of her country to the other.

The adventurer had not, however, happily for the success of her enterprize, to pass along the crowded streets of coarse, profligate London, nor to walk through the Strand to Somerset House, day after day, as poor shrinking Clara did ; dreading, in spite of her simple, modest dress and demeanour, that she should encounter some impudent familiarity, and often trembling under the fear of meeting Lord Ashford's angry



eye at every turn ; and, in truth, not a day passed without her meeting, not with him, but with odious impertinences.

It was, therefore, no surprise to her when, one day, she became aware, as she drew near Somerset House, that some one was following her, and had been doing so for a considerable time, but she walked so fast that hitherto her pursuer had not succeeded in getting to her side, and she hoped to reach the shelter of the Exhibition Rooms before he had been able to annoy her by a closer approach. At last, she gained the door, and hastily showed her ticket of admission ; but she was stopped at the next turn, by having to give up her parasol. This took some time, as there happened to be a great many persons waiting before her in the passage, for the same purpose. Here, however, believing

herself to be perfectly secure from her harassing enemy, she ventured to turn half round, when, to her great distress, she found that he was at her side. At this moment, a crowd of persons hurrying past, one of them accidentally jerked the ticket, on which her name as an artist was written, out of her hand. The man who had been persecuting her so long picked it up, and with the most impertinent freedom read her name, and then, with a dandy bow, presented it to her. She received it with the slightest possible acknowledgment and without looking up, for she felt, though she did not wish to see, the impudent leer which accompanied his pretended act of politeness.

She glided up the long staircase, still conscious that this man was close behind her ; she wandered about the rooms, always

tracked by him, with her head bowed down, pressed down, as it were, by her feeling of degradation at finding herself the object of this insult ; and when at last she chanced to catch a glimpse of the face of the unmanly tormentor, who was thus tyrannizing over her unprotected weakness, she saw, with terror, that it was the same person who, on two previous occasions, had been the harbinger of pain and sorrow to her ; the same that had shocked her with his libertine stare in the lane at Richmond, uttering words there, which afterwards remembered, and associated with what followed, seemed as if they had been the sounds that ushered her into the valley of the shadow of death ; the same who had boldly and rudely intruded upon her in her peaceful cottage, whence, as if by some baleful in-

fluence, that followed him like a fatality, she had been immediately expelled.

From different parts of the room she saw him constantly fixing his odious eyes upon her, whenever she ventured for a moment to lift hers from the pictures ; and though she tried to elude him, by mixing with the crowd, she could not avoid hearing him, close by her, humming a tune, and feeling his loathed hand brush against her arm. Wretched and terrified to stay in the rooms, she was still more afraid to go, as she felt sure that he would pursue her.

It was, therefore, an unspeakable relief to her to see Mr. Esdaile, her former good-natured master, coming towards her to offer himself as her escort. She eagerly availed herself of his arm, carefully, however, concealing the cause of her previous discom-

fort, and of the state of agitation in which he found her ; for it is one of the circumstances which tended to rivet the fetters imposed by custom on the women of those days, that their relations or friends who established themselves as their protectors and champions, chose to use their horse-whips, to fight duels, and to enact tragedies on their own account, instead of being of real use when the occasion occurred in which their help was required ; so that no woman, having any foresight, or possessing any self-control, failed to put up with the grossest insult rather than complain to her brother or husband.

It was with real delight that Sir Frederick Buckton discovered, when she turned her head, that while he thought he was merely pursuing an elegant, timid-looking, unprotected girl, with no other purpose than

that which his habitual libertine feeling prompted, he had actually lighted upon the very woman of whom he had been so long in search. To stare at her, or frighten her by impudently accosting her, was now quite a secondary object; the point was to find out who she was, and where she lived, and this point was secured to him by the chance which threw the ticket, with her name on it, at his feet. This at once suggested that she was an artist, and the catalogue which he held in his hand told him all the rest. It pointed out her pictures that hung on the walls, and the direction of her house. His impertinences were, however, by no means at an end; for, whenever or wherever she and Mr. Esdaile stopped to look at a picture, there was this man's face close at her shoulder. Finding, however, that there was no pro-

bability of her again being alone, he at last grew tired of this fruitless amusement and left the rooms, betaking himself, without delay, to Mrs. Dalton's, in one of the streets in the neighbourhood of Portman Square.

Meantime, Clara lingered on at the Exhibition, hour after hour, when Mr. Esdaile had left her, whom she scrupled to detain. Afraid to walk home, lest she should again encounter her persecutor, when at last she took courage to leave the rooms, she almost ran along the streets as if still pursued by him. She had already resolved to visit the Exhibition no more, unless when her friend Dr. Weston could accompany her, which, of course, would be but seldom. Such was the first great trouble that befel her in her artist life.

Mrs. Dalton was not a little entertained

with the account Sir Frederick gave her of his encounter. It never occurred to this unwomanly lady that this insult offered to one of her own sex was indirectly offered to herself. She saw nothing of the cruel bondage which she helped to confirm, nor was conscious that in oppressing one woman she added her mite to the oppression of all, by encouraging the habit of making them a prey. She belonged to a class with whom a man of spirit, when he boasts of being a good shot or a bold hunter, may feel that he is equally sure of admiration, whether his game be birds, stags, or women.

While, however, Mrs. Dalton eagerly received Sir Frederick's gossip, and was at all times ready to hunt out and retail every immoral piece of scandal, she was so punctilious on this very subject of morals,



that she would not allow a woman of questionable reputation to brush the hem of her garment; the slightest intercourse with such a person she regarded as contamination, though she had been known to exercise sufficient Christian virtue and forbearance to encounter this on one or two occasions which afforded her an opportunity of reproof and lecturing.

## CHAPTER X.

“ I am sprighted with a fool ;  
Frighted, and angered worse.”

SHAKESPERE. -

THE next day a visitor knocked at Clara's door, and Sir Frederick Buckton, with the most forward insolence, followed his card into her painting-room, without waiting for a permission which he well knew he should never receive. Then walking up to her he had the impertinence

to take her hand, and shake it with the utmost familiarity. Astonishment and alarm at such an intrusion had made Clara start to her feet, and she continued standing that she might not appear to invite her unwelcome visitor to be seated. He, however, did not wait for any invitation, but brought forward a chair, saying,—

“Now, pray, my dear creature, don’t let me keep you standing, nor allow me to disturb you. Don’t let there be any ceremony between us ; nothing can be so out of place. Lord bless your soul, if you knew more o’ me you would find that I am not at all that sort o’ man. Well,” he exclaimed, “well, I was glad to see you at the Exhibition yesterday. You can’t do better than study the pictures there. Now, let me see what you are about yourself. Ah ! very good, very fair ! I call this a

good bit of stuff; that left side of the forehead is devilish good. But be advised by me; always consult me about your draperies. This dark dress won't do; won't do at all. Why, never dress a dark woman in a dark dress. Now, take out this olive back-ground, and put in a blue sky; place your sitter in a red chair, and give her a bright dress. Anything bright,—gold colour, if you choose,—and your picture's made; as it is, it won't do. Allow me to see that picture on your desk. Ah! a child. Well, this is not bad; still the back-ground won't do. It must be light, not dark. Wash it out, and put in a blue sky; alter the dress—make it a clear red, and bring in something yellow here,—a yellow sofa or curtain, and take my word for it, your picture's made. Ah! I can see who sat for your lady. There's a good

deal of likeness ; but you can't make anything of such a subject. She's as black as a mulatto, and mere skin and bone, instead of flesh and blood."

Clara stood listening, too inexperienced to feel at all confident of her own skill. Staggered for the moment by Sir Frederick's voluble use of art-like sounding words, and by the tone of authority with which they were uttered, she really began to pay some attention to his remarks, and to suppose that he knew something of the matter.

"Are you then an artist, sir?" said she.

"Yes, to be sure I am. An artist? Yes, and other things beside ; and I like you all the better for finding it out. But I am not an artist by profession, my dear girl. However, there is not a painter in London

who wouldn't be glad to get me into his studio to tell him how to paint his pictures. There's Frank Rush—you know him, of course—I have just been with him, and I said,—‘Lord bless your soul, my dear fellow, you haven't a picture here worth a shilling, all unfinished, all out o' drawing, all badly composed. Now take my advice, and I'll show you how to put them to rights ; take out your darks, put lights in their places—that will make pictures of 'em.’ Frank would give anything to paint a picture of me. Why, it would be the making of him. Every one about town knows me. I told him so the first day I ever saw him. But I always say,—‘whenever I consent to have my picture done a lady shall paint me ; and I'll show her what a sitter should be. I'll teach her what a subject can be ; and I'll be the making of her.’ ”

Clara listened in a sort of bewildered astonishment to all this harangue, expecting every moment that her visitor would tell her that his object in calling on her was to sit for his picture. She was considering how she should announce her determination not to comply with this request ; but she was spared this embarrassment, for he proposed nothing of the kind, though he several times repeated his declaration of how greatly it would be to her advantage to paint him. He next presumed to put several questions to her touching her prospects in life, to which, however, she gave no answer. He then gave her a great deal of instruction and advice in painting.

Somewhat quieted by his patronizing and paternal air, and by his making no allusion to ever having seen her before, she began to entertain the hope that he

really did not remember her. Though her disgust towards him and her anxiety to get him away increased every instant, yet resolving to make herself secure of his never being admitted again, she endeavoured, as long as she saw no reason to apprehend any personal insult from him, to behave quietly and civilly.

At length, becoming tired of acting the part of teacher of painting, or having exhausted all his store of knowledge, he began the relation of some of the adventures of his earlier life, on which, as they very soon verged on grossness, Clara hastily rose from her chair, and with a grave and severe silence moved towards the door.

At that moment, Sir Frederick, starting up also, and colouring slightly, as if ashamed of himself at being so easily put down by a girl, cried out, somewhat sharply :



“Stop! I have something more to say to you. Pray tell me, have you seen anything of Lord Ashford lately?”

There was an expression in his countenance, as he said this, which shocked Clara even more than his words; and, without making any reply, she continued to move still more hastily towards the door.

By a quick motion, Sir Frederick placed himself before it, laughing insultingly.

“Well,” said he, “I like a girl of spirit. It becomes you devilishly. I think you are quite right not to talk too much about it; but you and I are no strangers.”

“I know you not,” cried Clara, indignantly; “and this intrusion shall no longer be endured.”

Sir Frederick, without appearing to notice her, went on:—

“I see you have entered on a new

career. Of course, it would not tell in your favour, (with ladies, at least) if your former intercourse with Lord Ashford were known. But you may depend upon me, and I can give you this comfort—why, bless my soul! a pretty woman like you, can always have plenty o’ sitters among our sex. I think all the better of you—upon my soul I do—for what has happened.”

Unable to bear this any longer, Clara ran to the bell, and rang it loudly. In an incredibly short time Susan was in the room. Sir Frederick, nothing abashed, took up his hat and cane, and, turning on his heel, said to Susan :

“My good girl, mind you take care of your pretty mistress. I shall never forgive you if you don’t.”

Then, without appearing to observe that

Clara had turned away, and was at the farthest end of the room, he added :

“ You would have found a portrait o’ me of great use to you. There’s not a family in town that does not know me. When your picture was seen at the Exhibition, every one would have looked at it ; every one would have asked me, ‘ Buckton, my friend, who painted your miniature ? ’ and, trust me, I should have known what to answer. I should have told all the men ‘ a devilish pretty girl painted it. ’ ”

He tried to push Susan with his elbow ; but she started away to a little distance from him, where she stood, watching anxiously the movements of her mistress.

Sir Frederick then put on his hat jauntily, a little on one side, and carefully buttoned up his coat, when turning once more to Clara, who still remained at the farther end

of the room, with her back towards him, he still counselled her to get on with her painting, informing her that he should return in a day or two, to give her some advice about it.

“God bless ye!” cried he, “good bye!” and began running down-stairs, as if in a hurry.

Suddenly, however, he turned back, pushed open the door with the point of his cane, and said :

“I am going to the Continent in a few days ; perhaps I shan’t see you till I return : but if I don’t, you’ll get on with your painting.”

Once more he began to go down-stairs, but soon turned again. Now, however, Susan was close behind him, and he could not easily pass her. He, therefore, proceeded on his way, constantly looking back, and

repeating to Susan his assurances of the great use which his patronage would prove to her mistress.

When the door was closed behind him, Sir Frederick, with a face puckered all over with smiles of satisfaction, and brim full of the scandal that was about to pour forth from his tongue, repaired straightway to the house of Mrs. Dalton, where it was his custom to pay a visit almost daily. To his great mortification, he found she had just driven out, and all his attempts to join her that day miscarried. The circumstances he had to communicate, appeared to him to increase in importance every hour during which he was compelled to confine the knowledge of them to his own bosom.

On the following morning, he repeated his visit to Mrs. Dalton, whom he found dressed to go out, waiting the arrival of Lady

Ashford to take a drive. The rich entertainment he had to serve was soon in full flow, and the two friends were in the eager enjoyment of it, each heightening the relish with which the other devoured morsel after morsel, and adding one racy suggestion more to all the rest, when Lady Ashford was announced. Mrs. Dalton, with her usual officious zeal, immediately invited Sir Frederick to take a seat in the carriage.

Lady Ashford was exceedingly annoyed at this; for she detested being compelled to do awkward things, and it was not possible that she should be seen in company with Sir Frederick after the breach that had occurred between him and Lord Ashford, whose determinations she made a point of never questioning nor opposing. Not possessing the presence of mind and

ready wit which would have enabled some people to get out of the scrape handsomely, she said, with an uneasy manner, and flushed cheek :

“No ; I am sorry not to be able to ask Sir Frederick to join us.”

Though angry at the affront, the baronet showed nothing of it in his manner. For a few minutes each of the party felt a little awkwardness, but Sir Frederick soon entirely removed it. Perhaps, however, this unintentional offence, secretly determined him not to spare Lady Ashford the pain, which it happened at the moment to be in his power to inflict upon her. But for this he might have made no allusion to the subject, at least on this occasion, for she had always treated him with attention, and hitherto he had felt no ill will towards her ; while she, on her part, anxious to repair the incivility to which she

had been compelled, sat down to chat with him instead of going out with Mrs. Dalton, and thus readily fell into his snare.

“ I have just met with a person,” he began in a soft and sympathizing tone, “ to whom your ladyship was formerly extremely kind.”

“ Indeed ; who may that be ?”

“ A lady whose life was saved by your hospitality ; I should rather say, by your unexampled attention.”

“ I have no recollection—”

“ You cannot have forgotten the young lady who was thrown from her horse some years ago at Richmond.”

“ Oh, I remember.”

“ In company with Lord Ashford,” he added, with a slight peculiar emphasis that suggested the effrontery he intended.

“ Sir Frederick has seen Mrs. Merton,



that young widow," interposed Mrs. Dalton, also with a peculiar emphasis, and casting a significant glance at Sir Frederick.

"Is there anything so very remarkable in having again met this young lady?" inquired Lady Ashford.

"She has been seen philandering about by herself in the public streets," replied Mrs. Dalton.

"Quite alone at the Exhibition," rejoined Sir Frederick.

"Did I not understand you to say, Sir Frederick, that she is in poor circumstances?" asked Mrs. Dalton.

"Very poor indeed, and paints miniature portraits."

"Poor soul," said Mrs. Dalton, "doubtless, she does not make much by it; she seemed to be a useless silly thing; it would have suited her better to have taken in plain

work, than attempt what she cannot live respectably by.

“ I am sorry to hear this account,” said Lady Ashford, “ I did not know that she was in distressed circumstances.”

“ She still retains a good deal of beauty,” replied Sir Frederick, “ and has undoubtedly some talent.”

“ I am surprised at what you tell me,” said Lady Ashford, with much animation, as if a sudden thought had struck her. I now remember distinctly, that Lord Ashford told me she was well provided for at her husband’s death.”

“ Yes, at her husband’s death,” repeated Sir Frederick in the same peculiar tone.

Lady Ashford, without noticing him, and as if occupied with her own thoughts, continued :—

“ I should have been glad to have been

of any use to her in my power, if I had known of this ; she interested me extremely,”

“ Do not concern yourself on that score,” replied Sir Frederick ; “ she has been well taken care of, you may rely upon it ; his lordship knew well what he was saying, when he reported so favourably of her condition.”

Lady Ashford looked up quickly, and fixed her eyes upon him, as if to read in his face the meaning which his words seemed only half to convey.

There was nothing to be learnt from that countenance, which had assumed a more vacant expression than usual.

“ I do not in the least understand what you mean, sir,” said Lady Ashford coldly.

“ I mean that she was well taken care of,” replied Sir Frederick, with a coarse laugh.

Lady Ashford’s brow contracted, and a

slight expression of disgust passed over her countenance.

It was not lost upon Sir Frederick, who instantly saw that he had gone too far. Changing his tone, and laying his hand in a sort of paternal manner on her arm, he said,—

“ God bless me, my dear lady, you misapprehend me entirely.”

“ I do not know how I can have *misapprehended* you,” replied Lady Ashford, “ for I have not apprehended at all a single word you have said.”

“ There you are !” replied Sir Frederick. “ Suspicious of evil where none was intended. I should be the last man in the world to insinuate that there was anything improper in the interest which, we all know, Lord Ashford took in this lady.”

“ It is well, sir,” replied Lady Ashford

coldly ; I, myself, took a great interest in her."

" She was a very fine girl," continued Sir Frederick, " certainly a very fine grown girl ; one likes to see them ; people o' the world must not have overstrained notions about such things. Oh, Lord ! they will happen, do or say what we will !"

Lady Ashford made a slight movement, as if she would have placed herself at a greater distance from Sir Frederick. His words awakened feelings which, almost unconsciously to herself, made her recoil from him ; and though he disavowed any insinuations against her husband, still there was a tone of levity, not to say profligacy, in his conversation, which, now that it related to a person in whom she had taken a sincere interest, appeared positively odious to her.

“There was something singularly gentle in that young lady,” she said aloud, rather as if giving expression to her own thoughts than continuing the conversation, “and it is inconceivable to me, how any one, man or woman, could seek to injure her.”

“God bless you, my good lady,” quickly answered Sir Frederick, “so far from attempting to injure her, I have endeavoured to do her the greatest service. I have given her advice about her painting, (and she is but a young hand at her best,) which, if she will but follow, her fortune is made. I, as well as your ladyship, take a great interest in her.”

“Where does this very interesting person pursue her new vocation?” inquired Mrs. Dalton.

“In a small house in Devonshire-street,” replied Sir Frederick.

“Would it not be as well that we should call on her,” continued Mrs. Dalton, who had so keen a scent for mischief, that she perceived it distinctly at this distance, “we may then, perhaps, find a mode of expressing our interest in some more substantial manner than by words.”

“Very true,” replied Lady Ashford, with a look of unconscious surprise at the last speaker, for without being an acute analyser of feeling, Lady Ashford was a woman of true feeling, and had a keen natural sense of what was genuine feeling in those whom she intimately knew. This innate sense gave her the instantaneous impression that there was something in such language from Mrs. Dalton’s lips not in harmony with her habitual character.

“I am sure,” resumed Sir Frederick, “your ladyship’s kind heart will be ready to

help this poor girl to keep out of worse mischief. I cannot interfere so much as I would wish. She might misinterpret the interest I take in her. Women are apt to do so ; it is quite natural, and for my part, I don't want to get into any scrapes o' that kind now."

Lady Ashford looked at him steadfastly for an instant, reading his hypocrisy as if in legible characters, but was silent.

Sir Frederick felt a little conscious of that reading, and knowing that the process was going on under an intelligent eye, he assumed an air of greater sincerity, though he gave to his reader a perfect insight into his character by the very words he used to set himself right with her.

"I am quite sincere, I do assure your ladyship. I really can't afford it. I am a married man. God bless me ! circum-



stanced as I am with Lady Buckton, it would never do. Perhaps, when I was a single man, it might have been a different story. My heart was melted in a moment! It was once apt to melt. Too apt! God bless me! I could tell your ladyship some very curious histories."

"I will not trouble you," said Lady Ashford, with a contempt in her manner which her words did not express, and which Sir Frederick, pre-occupied with his own successful adventures before he fell into the hands of his vigilant Lady Buckton, did not perceive.

Both ladies now rose to take their drive, and as the carriage moved off with them, Lady Ashford said, "Really, Janet, your friend, Sir Frederick, has exhibited himself in something of a new character this morning."

“You could never have thought him particularly refined,” replied Mrs. Dalton.

“Nor did I believe him to be utterly heartless.”

“He may be utterly heartless, as you think, Lady Ashford, but he does not seem to me to have given any proof of it to-day. Why may not his interest in this poor lassie of an artist be sincere? What but a kind motive towards her could induce him to wish you to call on her?”

Lady Ashford was silent. “Poor lassie of an artist!” These words called up before her view a picture so different from that which her memory still retained of that gentle and graceful Clara, that her thoughts turned on the sad vicissitudes to which some unhappy beings are doomed, and from which none are absolutely secure in this world. Painful, suspicious feelings

almost unconsciously to herself, began to be associated in her mind with the idea of this unfortunate stranger ; but this image of her not only took out of them, at least for the moment, all bitterness, but imparted to them a degree of tenderness which was visible in the expression of her lips.

“ Can any thing be done to serve her ? ” was the thought that occupied her mind. From the reverie into which, for a moment, this question had plunged her, she was suddenly roused by the voice of Mrs. Dalton, which seemed to be entirely out of unison with her feeling, while the words it uttered answered literally to her thoughts.

“ You could not do better than sit to her for your picture,” said she. “ There is no time like the present. Shall I order Thomas to drive to Devonshire-street ? I have the direction.”

“No, no.—Oh no !” cried Lady Ashford, “not now ; not so ; something must be done, but not in that way.”

“Mrs. Dalton knew her sister, and saw from her emotion that her own object was gained. There was certain to be somehow or other a meeting between them. It mattered little to this unscrupulous woman how her purpose was brought about, so long as it was accomplished. She had no reason to dislike Clara, but she was satisfied that there was some relation of a dangerous character between her and one other person, for whom she had a profound hatred. Here were elements of mischief which, by commingling, must kindle and explode. Who else suffered by the explosion she cared not, as long as it involved the main object of her malice.

## CHAPTER XI.

“ Yet though thou chastenest me, I flee unto thee,  
And put my trust in thee ; and at thy feet  
Lay down my precious things.”

MARY HOWITT.

LADY ASHFORD differed but little from the general character of women of her class, excepting that she possessed an acuter and stronger intellect ; and under a colder manner, concealed a more sensitive nature. Partly, however, from natural indolence, cherished by the habits of life peculiar to her

station, it was only on rare occasions that she gave any manifestation of the superior qualities of her mind ; and it was not a little that could melt and penetrate the exterior crust of coldness that enveloped the inner and better part of her nature. In the bottom of her heart she cherished a sincere respect and regard for her husband, while his coldness and reserve fostered and increased her own, preventing any happy intercourse between them. But she regarded him as a man of strict honour, whose purposes and aims were noble, and without having any direct influence over him, and scarcely any of the indirect, silent but most powerful influence which the companionship of a wife exercises over the thoughts, feelings, and actual course of life of her husband, she endeavoured as far as she was capable of understanding him, to act in

unison with him, and carefully abstained in her outward conduct from opposing even his prejudices. Opposition to him appeared to her mind as a kind of infidelity, and the present was perhaps the only occasion in her life, in which she had felt any desire to do what she was secretly conscious would not be in accordance with his wishes, and might incur his decided disapprobation.

But she felt an interest in this girl, a curiosity which was new to her, and which she could not repress, to ascertain her real position and character. That Lord Ashford was acquainted with her history, whatever it might be, she felt certain ; that he was in some way or other connected with it, she unwillingly suspected. Then came the thought of her attractiveness, her intelligence, her refinement, and emotions were

awakened in her bosom of a most painful nature, so much the more painful, that she was dissatisfied with herself for being capable of them. It was Lord Ashford's affair : whatever might be its nature, ought she to obtrude herself into it ? Whatever might be its nature, could her interference possibly answer any good purpose ?

"No, unquestionably no," whispered her own heart.

"Let us know more about her," urged Mrs. Dalton. "What harm can it do to see her ? Perhaps you will lose the chance of helping one in whom you take so great an interest," suggested this worker of evil.

The worker of evil prevailed. A note was sent to Clara, inclosing the cards of the two ladies, and requesting that if she was not particularly engaged, she would receive them the next day at two o'clock.



On Clara the sight of these names acted like a malignant influence. It suddenly called up before her in all their former terror, old and frightful associations which she had struggled to suppress, and which she had in some degree succeeded in obliterating.

“I cannot go through this. I cannot bear it. I cannot see them,” she cried, in an agony of grief.

“You are right, entirely right,” said Leonora, who, astonished at this incident and still more alarmed, devoted herself with the deepest sympathy to comfort and restore her to calmness. “You shall not see them. By some means or other, you shall be protected from this intrusion. These women shall not come here, I am resolved.”

Leonora was excited as she said this, for the proposal on their part to make this visit

seemed to her, in the last degree strange, and filled her mind with uneasy and anxious suspicions.

“I thank you,” cried Clara, “for this comfort : thank you, for ever thank you, for telling me, that I must not meet them.”

“Their presence would kill you ; it is more than human nature can bear.”

“Yes, the thought of that woman, of *his* wife, has always been more terrible to me than I can possibly express; and to see her, to be in the same room with her, to breathe the same air with her, to hear her voice, I should die;” and she threw herself in a passion of uncontrollable grief on the bosom of her friend.

Leonora did not speak : for her heart was full, and she felt that she could suggest no topic of consolation to her friend.

How long they had remained in the silent abstraction of an absorbing grief they knew not, but they were at length roused to consciousness by the presence of Bertha, whom they found gazing on them with earnest attention ; and Clara was inexpressibly moved when she saw the child with her eyes filled with tears, lay her arms round Leonora's neck, and heard her say, in an imploring voice,—

“ The great God who loveth us,  
He made, and loveth all ”

It seemed to Clara to be a voice from heaven, coming at once to reprove and to guide her. There appeared absolutely to sound in her ears, at the same moment, words that gave to her impression all the effect of reality—“ Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected wis-

dom." A comparative calmness came over her agitated spirit, and subjects, of which she had hitherto taken an excited and exaggerated view, now presented themselves to her very much more in their true characters and just proportions.

Up to this moment, deeply as she had resolved, and faithfully as she had endeavoured, on all occasions, to sacrifice every feeling of her own, which she supposed to be necessary to *his* security, yet the possibility of ever entertaining any feeling towards Lady Ashford but that of aversion, amounting, indeed, to horror, had never occurred to her. Now she was raised by her little child into a new and higher state of feeling, such as before she had no conception of; and when alone with Leonora, she said, calmly :

"You know the relief it was to me

when you said you would prevent this meeting. I thought it was impossible for me to endure her presence. I have often pictured to myself how unspeakably dreadful it would be to me to be in the same room with her. My feeling to her has amounted to hatred. This is wrong. I shall overcome it. Our darling Bertha has taught me that it is possible to do so, and I am now resolved to go through with this matter. It is right on every account, and it is necessary for the sake of my own heart, that I should be able to look on her without that painful, that ungenerous—I had almost said that ignominious—emotion. My reason tells me that if she has been the cause of dreadful suffering to me, it has been without intention on her part, and that she does not even know it;

she is *his* wife; she is a part of him whom I——”

Here her voice faltered, and became inaudible. After a moment's pause, she continued:

“But shall I on that account hate her! Oh! no, no. If God will permit me, I will even try to love her, or at least to feel kindly towards her. Perhaps I shall have occasion to pity her—perhaps she is not happy. But whether happy or unhappy now, what would she be if she were ever to suspect who I am—what I have been? No, never shall this be known to her. On her account, as well as on his, I will guard this secret from her slightest suspicion; and when he finds from her that she has been here, and sees by her manner that I have been faithful and true to him, perhaps he will learn what my love to him is.”

This last thought overwhelmed her, and she again sank into a state of violent and passionate grief; but her resolution remained unaltered, and Leonora made no effort to change it.

## CHAPTER XII.

“Thy mind shines through thee like a radiant sun,  
Although thy body be a beauteous cloud.”

*Beaumont and Fletcher.*

THE next day, punctually as the hour struck two, a handsome carriage drove to the door of the humble dwelling in Devonshire Street, and two fashionably-dressed ladies were ushered by Susan into Clara's unpretending painting-room.

A slight flush was on the cheek of one,



and her manner was not easy; the expression and bearing of the other was presuming and repulsive.

No one was in the room when they entered, and they had plenty of time to make their observations,—a privilege of which the latter seemed in no degree disinclined to avail herself.

“I don’t very much like the appearance of the house,” said Mrs. Dalton, “I must say. The furniture is poor and trumpery trash; then, there is more attempt at fine taste than is at all wise-like. I doubt, I doubt, as Sir Frederick said. I hope she has not fallen into disreputable ways.”

Lady Ashford was silent, and was evidently not attending to a word which her sister said.

Mrs. Dalton continued to examine everything in the room with a scrutinizing eye,

her lips occasionally moving ; and if her words had been audible, they would have been to the following effect :

“ I wonder how long she has taken to painting ? Who taught her ? How much has she laid by since she began ? How many sitters has she had ? Does any one live here with her ? Has she only a lodging, or the whole house ? Has she any children ? Who were her parents ? What was her husband ? What did he die of ? Surely she has had time enough to get over her loss ! What were her husband’s connexions ? Do they do anything for her ? How old is she ? How does she spend her evenings ? I hope she makes her own clothes, and does all her sewing at home. What church does she go to ? Who is her minister ? I wonder what her weekly bills come to ? ”

Such was the train of thought that passed through Mrs. Dalton's mind, and such were the questions which, in the character of a patroness, she was prepared to ask, the very conception of which would not be likely on such an occasion to enter any human mind, except that of a Scotch-woman of a certain class, of which Mrs. Dalton was the type.

Meantime, the knock at the door sounded like the knell of death to Clara, and, notwithstanding the earnestness and apparent success with which she had struggled against it, all her terror instantly returned with its full force. She ran to her own room, and, locking the door, threw herself on her knees by her bedside, weeping passionately ; and for some moments, nothing approaching to calmness entered her bursting heart. Then suddenly came

to her mind a horrible idea. "Could *he* know of this? could he have sent them to insult her? Oh, no, no, no." Her next thought was—"Could they have come, suspecting the truth, to try to drag more from her? What, then, would be the consequences to him?"

Again her resolution returned. She started up, and her hand was on the lock of the door to descend to her painting-room, but the apprehension of her own weakness stopped her, and once more turning back she knelt down and prayed for strength to endure this most agonizing torture for *his* sake; yes, for his sake, as she had already and successfully tried to live.

Conscious that if she remained absent the embarrassment of the meeting would be increased,—that they might even go

away, before she went down, with their worst suspicions confirmed, if they had formed any, without waiting to allow a faltering thought to return, she hurried down stairs and entered the room.

Lady Ashford was struck with awe when she looked at the expression of her calm pale face, as if she had been in the presence of a saint. Even Mrs. Dalton was a little taken by surprise, and forgot the interrogations with which she had come prepared.

The best feelings of Lady Ashford's naturally kind heart were awakened, and she yielded to the nobler impulses of her nature.

With an air of frankness, and in a gentle voice, in which might have been discerned a slight tremulousness, she said to Clara :

“If we had thought that our presence

would have distressed you, we would not have asked permission to see you. Will you believe me that we did not call on you with the intention of giving you pain?"

To Clara these words, and particularly the tone in which they were spoken, gave the impression of sincerity and sympathy, and she replied frankly, "I do believe you."

Then, as if suddenly suspecting that Lady Ashford's feeling was that of compassion that she had fallen from the position of a lady to that of an artist, and unspeakably relieved at the thought that this was the nature of her feeling, she added :—

"I have always taken great pleasure in the pursuit of the art I have chosen."

"The occupation of an artist is no doubt

agreeable," replied Lady Ashford, who was now restored to perfect calmness, and who assumed that easy manner which makes every one else feel at ease; "but the public practice of it is quite another matter, and I have often thought that there is one thing in the position of a woman who practises a profession that must sometimes make it very distressing to her."

"What can that be?" asked Mrs. Dalton, whose ordinary state of feeling was rapidly returning.

"She has no choice as to her visitors; she must receive all who choose to come."

"A woman who practises a profession," said Mrs. Dalton, "must make up her mind to encounter worse difficulties than receiving disagreeable visitors."

"To many persons, no doubt, there are worse difficulties," replied Lady Ashford,

still looking gently on Clara ; “ but I can conceive of some natures by whom this would be considered among the very worst.”

“ Oh ! there are worse, much worse,” answered Clara.

“ What do you think worse ?” replied Lady Ashford.

“ Self-mistrust,” answered Clara ; “ the fear of having undertaken what you cannot accomplish.”

“ But a person of good sense,” said Lady Ashford, “ who not lightly fixes on a profession, indicates by that very choice a consciousness of power.”

“ Pardon me,” broke in Mrs. Dalton, “ whim, self-conceit, ignorance, presumption, may be at the bottom of the choice.”

“ To many,” said Clara, replying to Lady Ashford, “ there is no choice.”



“What then?”

“Necessity.”

“True,” replied Lady Ashford; “you mean that persons are sometimes, and perhaps, very unexpectedly, placed in a position in which they are obliged to turn to account whatever talents or acquirements they have, or can be supposed to have.”

“A position that changes the whole relation and the entire aspect of life,” said Clara, with an earnestness of which she was not conscious.

The sincerity and single-heartedness indicated in the manner, even more than the words of Clara, made a deep impression on Lady Ashford, and she said :

“Yes, that is a stern necessity ; and it is one which must sometimes present itself in the shape of a sense of duty.”

“ A sense of duty so deep,” replied Clara, with the same earnestness, “ that all personal consequences are forgotten.”

“ But in that case,” observed Lady Ashford, “ the struggle can seldom be a long one. The very sincerity of purpose must soon prove a faithful teacher, and set clearly before the mind the unfitness for the undertaking, if such unfitness really exists ; and yet,” she continued, “ great anxiety for success may naturally beget doubt as to the possession of the talent necessary for securing it, when no doubt ought to exist.”

“ But the doubt itself,” answered Clara, “ whether the ground for it is real or not, is a bitterness in the lot of that person’s life who is doomed to feel it, which none who have not felt it can estimate.”

“ It must be difficult,” replied Lady

Ashford, "to keep patiently and diligently at work under the influence of such a depressing influence."

"It implies a devotedness and fidelity which ought to be crowned with success," answered Clara, a tear starting to her eye, and her cheek becoming sensibly paler ; "but alas ! it often ends in utter failure."

"Never," answered Lady Ashford, with animation. "The human being who, under such trying circumstances, devotes himself to his duty, can never fail. He receives a nobler reward than is achieved in what is commonly called success. The virtues that are developed in him are of higher value than fortune or fame ; at least," she continued, in a lower and almost solemn tone, "they are of higher value in the sight of God, whatever may be the estimation of man."

Clara felt her heart glow within her, and the unfeigned admiration expressed in her pure, gentle, astonished gaze, penetrated Lady Ashford. All her suspicious feelings had vanished; she felt that she was in the presence of an innocent and holy being; she reproached herself for having listened so readily to insinuations which she now saw were contemptible: she gathered enough from Clara's language and manner to be assured that she needed help, or at least encouragement, and as the most natural mode of immediately affording both, she proposed to sit for her picture; not doubting that this would lead to more intimate acquaintance, and in a simple and graceful manner, she made the arrangements for an early return for this purpose.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“ Thus in a moment  
\*        \*        all’s at once dispers’d,  
Like straws before a sudden open’d gate.”  
R. H. HORNE.

LADY Ashford continued faithful to the impression which her interview with Clara had produced upon her, notwithstanding the attempts of Mrs. Dalton to re-excite her former doubt and mistrust. She had also determined on her own course, and contemplated, with secret satisfaction, a

half-formed project of giving her picture, when finished, to Lord Ashford, as a proof of her confidence in him, and a reparation for the injury she had done him by her suspicions, indistinct and transient as they had been.

She foresaw that nothing would succeed in the presence of Mrs. Dalton ; she therefore returned to Clara, accompanied by a young lady, whom she introduced as Miss Grey, the niece of Lord Ashford.

It was a relief to Clara that Mrs. Dalton did not accompany Lady Ashford ; and though she had experienced less distress in the first meeting with her than she had expected, she was glad that Lady Ashford did not return alone. Miss Grey's easy manners and smiling expression of face ; her gay dress, fresh colour, and fair hair, altogether produced a cheerful impression,

and seemed to assist in banishing painful thoughts or topics of conversation.

The picture was taken in hand seriously, as a matter of business, everything that was said and done having reference to its progress ; and it prospered admirably. Clara gradually became so much engaged in her work that, notwithstanding the trying circumstances under which it was proceeding, her thoughts were really occupied about it ; yet still she secretly felt that Miss Grey's presence was somehow or other a kind of security, and it was quite a sorrow to her when Susan brought up word that "a carriage full of Ladies had called to take Miss Grey for a drive," and she went, intending to return in an hour.

The arrival of another carriage at the house, and the departure of Miss Grey, appeared to create some little commotion

outside the painting-room, during which it chanced that Lady Ashford caught a glance of Bertha through the opened door.

“That is your child,” said she to Clara.

“Yes,” replied Clara, “that is my little Bertha.”

“Pray let her come in,” said Lady Ashford, kindly.

Bertha came in, with a grave face, and took her station close to her mother, while, with her deep eyes, she seemed to examine the woman whose presence she knew had caused her mother so much painful emotion.

Lady Ashford good-naturedly held out her large, beautifully-formed, white hand glittering with magnificent jewels, to the little girl, and drew her gently across the room to her side. There Bertha stood for some minutes in silence, attentively observ-



ing the soft satin dress, and rich chains and jewels, till at last losing her reserve, she opened her little hand which till now had remained closed in that of the noble lady.

Lady Ashford, apparently pleased with this token of beginning confidence, looked quite round at the child, at the same time stroking her light curling hair away from her eyes, As she did this she suddenly saw something in Bertha that arrested and rivetted her attention. Her gaze was earnest and scrutinizing, and she seemed to be endeavouring to recall some likeness, or some half-forgotten idea. While thus absorbed, she unconsciously pushed the hair completely back from the large open forehead of the child, discovering a very peculiar brown mark on the temple. Instantly the sudden flush overspread Lady Ashford's face, which always appeared when she was agitated, and

she pushed Bertha away from her with some violence, as if her presence had excited an intensely painful feeling.

At this moment a loud struggling sort of noise was heard on the stair-case, accompanied by a child's voice, and then the painting-room door being suddenly flung open, the Honourable Miss Ashford burst in, followed by her nurse, who explained to her lady that Miss Matilda had grown tired of waiting in the carriage, and having seen a little girl at the window, had insisted on coming up.

"Well, there is no help then," said Lady Ashford, "I suppose you must leave her here."

With this permission the nurse went downstairs again, evidently glad to have the charge of the young lady off her hands.

This violent irruption changed for a mo-

ment the current of Lady Ashford's thoughts. The sitting was resumed, but she now sat silent, and soon relapsed into a train of painful and even agitating thought ; while Clara, in spite of her utmost efforts to calm herself, trembled so violently that more than once her pencil dropped from her shaking hand.

Meantime the active Matilda had immediately made up to Bertha, without the slightest shyness, and the merry voices of the two sisters playing together at the farther end of the room, were now the only sounds that interrupted the stillness.

In a short time Bertha grew tired of her companion, and came back again to Lady Ashford's chair. The near approach of the child increased her agitation and impatience, and she turned suddenly round with averted

head, placing herself in a position which rendered it impossible for Clara to go on with her painting.

At the moment when Clara, startled at this movement, stopped her work, irresolute and bewildered, Matilda suddenly rushed forward with a shout of delight, exclaiming, "Look, Mamma, look at this picture! Look at Papa!"

Finding on the table a desk unlocked, the busy hands of the child had opened the drawer, and quickly emptying it of its contents, seized upon the locket that contained the picture which Clara had painted from memory many years ago, of the lost husband of her youth.

Clara started forward, endeavouring to shut the case of the locket; but this attempt was vain; she next tried to force it from

the struggling child's fingers, but this effort was attended with no better success. Matilda screaming, kicking, and beating at her with fury, at last threw the picture in its open case into Lady Ashford's lap.

Without appearing to look at the portrait, Lady Ashford, with the utmost composure, closed the locket and laid it on the table.

She then rose, and with the coldness of her ordinary manner said, "I must beg permission to end this sitting. May I take the liberty of ordering my carriage?"

At the same time she very calmly rang the bell, and quietly but firmly taking Matilda, still screaming, by the hand, she left the room. In another minute the carriage had driven from the door.

"All is lost," said Clara, "I have ruined him. My failure is now complete."

And she sat down bewildered, stupified, bending her head upon her closed hands which pressed the locket between them as if to make it her companion in this new and most painful passage of her life.

## CHAPTER XIV.

“It may be play to you, but it is death to us.”

Æsop.

CLARA was still sitting in a state of stupor when the door opened, and Miss Grey came in.

“Is Lady Ashford gone?” she cried, “How very unlucky.”

“Most unlucky indeed,” answered Clara, quite unconscious of what she said,

“How have you got on with the picture? Will you let me look at it?—Ah!” she continued, after examining it for a considerable time in silence, “I can trace the likeness already. As yet, however, it is not nearly so sweet-looking as it ought to be. You do not know her; of course you cannot know her. Hers is not an expression easily caught and represented, it varies so very much; you have probably never seen anything of her best looks. I wish you could see her with Lord Ashford when he is saying something that pleases her.”

“It is useless to attempt it,—I shall never succeed,” said Clara, mournfully and abstractedly.

“Oh! you are quite wrong; it promises well; the position is graceful, and in excellent taste.”

Miss Grey’s pleasing, encouraging manner



began, after a time, to dispel in some degree Clara's wretched thoughts. A slight hope arose in her mind that, perhaps after all, Lady Ashford had not seen the picture in the locket, or that she had not recognised the likeness. Unconscious of the previous impression made by the mark on Bertha's temple, Clara conceived it to be possible, that her own excited behaviour towards Matilda was the real cause of Lady Ashford's sudden departure and indignant air.

"How very foolishly I have behaved," thought she; "Oh, that I had only had presence of mind to be calm."

Meanwhile Miss Grey had taken a seat by her side, and begun to converse on different matters, and Clara was for a time diverted from the subject of her anxiety by her companion's very agreeable manner and cheerful turn of thought, so that time un-

consciously glided on, till the sound of a clock striking five, made the young lady ask with some surprise, whether Lady Ashford had not left any message about sending the carriage back for her. On receiving for answer that nothing of the kind had passed, she once more resumed the conversation. Now, however, the topic became less agreeable and soothing, the mention of Lady Ashford's name inciting her to expatiate on the amiable qualities of her noble relations. She launched out into the highest eulogiums on both. According to her account, one was pure, refined, self-denying, and the other noble-minded, honourable, highly-gifted, conscientious. It was a pleasure of the most ennobling kind to witness their mutual love. They were thoroughly and deeply attached to each other, and in all respects well matched. Wholly unobservant of the

painful emotions she was exciting, she proceeded to relate various instances of their affection, and to give proofs of its strength.

The narrative produced an extraordinary change in Clara's feelings; surprise at what she had heard, so contrary to what she had previously believed, irritation against the teller of such tidings, irritation against herself for feeling pain at hearing them, and, finally, a state of mental suffering quite new to her. The shock which had rendered her life desolate, had filled her heart with anguish, but still this was in some degree mitigated, by the soothing belief that she was the object of a tender love. From the commencement of her artist-life, she so entirely devoted her time and thoughts to her profession, that her memory no longer dwelt on the calamities that had so nearly overwhelmed her. She was indeed too

anxious about success to be happy, but still this very anxiety was not without its advantage to her, as it was prevented from becoming excessive by the hope that mingled with it, and by the belief that the ultimate attainment of her object, depended on her own exertions.

But now a new emotion took possession of her soul, under the domination of which she became indifferent to art, to success, to hope, to every aim and object,—the corroding, degrading feeling of jealousy. That *he* was an object of love ought to be a consolation to her ; that he was capable of happiness ; that he was actually, daily, hourly, the recipient of it, ought to fill her with joy. It was not so. The ideas conjured up in her mind by the picture, presented to her imagination of his present state, *with* and *for* another, were torture to her, and

created a feeling little short of hatred towards that other. This passion, of which she was now the prey, and which she could not conquer, appeared to her to be so ungenerous, so base, that she began to feel a horror at herself.

All this pain was a mere gratuitous infliction, the representations which caused it being without the slightest real foundation. Miss Grey was in the habit of drawing on her imagination for her facts, and of seeing circumstances and persons not as they really exist, but as they appeared, coloured by her imagination, according as they favoured her wishes or flattered her vanity. It happened that she had been much gratified by the kindness shown to her by Lady Ashford, and still more by the unexpected complacency which Lord Ashford had manifested toward

her. On this feeling of gratification she had reared the whole structure of domestic bliss, which she had depicted, than which nothing could be more fictitious ; but her description had the charm of romance to herself, while it appeared to excite a deep interest in her auditor. On she went continually, therefore, heightening the picture by every touch which her fancy could suggest, while Clara, impelled by an impulse she was unable to restrain, aggravated her own suffering by asking, with apparent calmness, a multitude of questions, which her unconscious tormentor ever answered in the manner she conceived best calculated to render her description of domestic blessedness complete.

Thus occupied, Miss Grey took no note of time, which was, however, not to be

checked in its ordinary speed. At last, in a pause of the conversation, she looked at her watch; to her great surprise, she found that it was half-past six. The dinner hour at Lord Ashford's was seven; and inattention to punctuality was an offence not easily forgiven there. It was, however, quite clear that she must be much too late, and the only thing to be done was to go as quickly as possible, and to regain as much lost time as it was practicable for a hackney coach to achieve.

Meanwhile, Bertha had gone down to Leonora, who listened to the little girl's vague account of the adventures of the morning with extreme uneasiness. She was on the point of going up to Clara immediately, but was stopped by the emphatic manner in which Bertha said that her

mamma begged to be alone. At last, the child said, in a mysterious way:

“Do you know, Leonora, the little girl who was here has exactly the same curious mark on her forehead that I have. I once spoke of this to mamma; it made her cry so very much, and she told me that it was like my papa’s, whom we have lost. That little girl said, when we were playing together, that her papa, too, has just the same on his forehead. Is it not curious?”

This account, coupled with Bertha’s description of the incident of the locket, made Leonora very uneasy at the protracted visit of Miss Grey, and she several times went up to the painting-room door, resolved to go in; but the quiet hum of Miss Grey’s measured and musical voice re-assured her.



Still it was a great comfort to her when at last she heard the coach drive off. She immediately ran up to Clara; but on this occasion, even her affection could not soothe away the pain she witnessed. The wound was too deep.

## CHAPTER XV.

“The weariness, the fever, and the fret,  
Here, where men sit, and hear each other groan.”

KEATS.

MEANWHILE, the hackney coach—type of a description of conveyance now fast falling into oblivion—went on its usual lumbering, staggering way, and Miss Grey, not in the least discomposed by the consciousness of being too late, sat quietly within it, smiling complacently as she thought over several points in Clara’s cha-

racter, which had greatly charmed her impressible mind. She was aroused from her agreeable reveries by arriving at Lord Ashford's door, in the mode peculiar to hackney coaches, consisting of a series of starts and stops, terminating in a lateral shock, which, after threatening to deposit the whole vehicle, with its fare, on the pavement, concluded by leaving it upright in the kennel. Then the coachman, who looked like a large bundle of dirty coats and capes, seemed to fall off his box, and clumped up to the door, where he inflicted a knock and ring loud and long, as if to convince mankind that, contrary to all appearance, there was life and vigor in him.

When the coach was dismissed, Miss Grey, on learning that dinner was already served, hurried to her room; and after making a very hasty toilet, went down,

nothing daunted, to join the dinner party. On this occasion, the party consisted of Lord and Lady Ashford, Mrs. Dalton, and Mrs. Grey, who, at her brother's earnest request, occasionally joined them, though this was a penance to her, especially at the present period, when her usual amount of annoyances in the family circle were considerably augmented by Ellinor having become an inmate; for though everything had gone on smoothly hitherto, she could not help continually dreading some outbreak, conscious as she was of the many points of difference that existed between this very wilful young lady and her present hosts.

When, on the occasion in question, dinner time approached, and no Miss Grey appeared; when Lady Ashford, instead of presenting her usual lady-like appearance

and equable manner, with its cold, polished, surface, resembling elegant china ware, sate in the drawing-room, excited, her eyes swimming in tears, her dress disorderly, and her hair disarranged; when her maid, who had announced, as usual, the dressing hour, was dismissed, with the desire that she would bring down a large shawl; when the anxious inquiries of Constance were answered fretfully, and Mrs. Dalton's officious questions almost rudely; and when, precisely at five minutes before seven, Lord Ashford entered the room, dressed *point de vice*, every hair in its proper place, the whitest and finest linen, the thinnest black silk stockings, the most perfectly made shoes; and when Constance, looking in his face, saw the handsome features ready loaded to boom forth volleys of ill-humour at the approach of the first touch of irrita-

tion, it is no wonder that she gave a sigh of regret for her old quiet cottage, and that when she followed, as he led down Mrs. Dalton to dinner, she felt a chill come over her spirits, which checked every attempt to break the formal silence. As they passed the row of servants, marshalled in the lobby—comfortable, calm, contented-looking men, capable of laughing, joking, and being merry, with whom life probably went on easily—Constance could not help feeling the absurdity of the whole arrangement, and experienced a sort of melancholy scorn at the real misery and poverty of the company, infinitely superior as they deemed themselves to the six or seven, perhaps worthier and happier men, whom they called their servants.

Lord Ashford took no notice whatever of Ellinor's absence, and Mrs. Grey began to

hope that she would not come home to dinner at all, but the noisy, heavy arrival of the hackney coach, which she distinctly heard dispelled this hope: Mrs. Dalton heard it too, and did not fail to remark upon it.

It was well known to all the members of Lord Ashford's family, that he was extremely displeased by inattention to personal appearance. He said, that he reckoned it a duty we owe to society, as well as to ourselves, to be always prepared to receive guests whether expected or not. Ellinor was in general sufficiently attentive to this requirement, as it happened to accord with her own taste, but finding that dinner had already begun, she thought it best to hazard going down-stairs in her morning-dress, rather than make a further delay by waiting to change it. When the door was thrown

open for her admittance by Travers, the butler, she would have seen, at a glance, had she possessed even a moderate share of observation, that a heavier gloom than usual hung over the family circle. Lord Ashford sate silent, and morose, his restless eye shining angrily from beneath his contracted brow. Lady Ashford had turned away a little from the table ; her eyes were red and swollen ; her lips trembling with nervous agitation, as if she only restrained a fresh outbreak of tears with the greatest effort ; her hair was pushed off her forehead, and the only change in her dress, consisted in the large dark shawl she had fastened tightly across her chest. Mrs. Dalton according to her custom, was dressed in the most *recherché* style, but was in a more evil temper than usual, owing to a late contention with Lord Ashford. Mrs. Grey sat



quietly occupied with anxious thoughts concerning the sad state of her poor sister-in-law, and never was there greater reason for apprehension. On no occasion since her marriage, had anything approaching to such a forgetfulness of all the proprieties of life been seen in her by any member of the family. All attempts to soothe her by any kind attention proved to be utterly vain; indeed, it was owing to an unsuccessful effort of this kind on the part of Mrs. Grey, that the chair had been pushed back, and a nearly sideways posture assumed, as if to shut her out from sight. Ellinor's entrance opened a fresh source of anxiety to Constance, who, nevertheless, was actually provoked with herself for feeling so much about such a trifling matter as her step-daughter being too late for dinner; still, she had seen too many instances of domestic discomfort

and wretchedness with her brother, about causes even more trifling, to be able to avoid experiencing a considerable nervous agitation about this.

The first course had just been removed, but Travers being in his way as strict an observer of etiquette as "my lord," chose to offer both soup and fish to Miss Grey, when she had taken the vacant chair by Mrs. Dalton.

"If he had but a spark of human kindness in him," thought Constance, "he would see how much better it would be simply to let things go on without any reference to the new comer, whose discomfort he must know will be increased, by the consciousness of retarding every one else."

While these thoughts were passing in her mind, to her surprise and increased annoyance, she saw Ellinor help herself delibe-

rately to soup, which she ate slowly and in silence, and afterwards take a fair proportion of fish, which the inexorable Travers duly presented to her. Upon this, Constance could not help saying to him, "Pray do not keep the rest of the dinner waiting for Miss Grey; let it be placed on the table."

"Certainly not," said Lord Ashford, raising his eyes to the valet, who stood behind his chair. "It will wait till Miss Grey has finished."

Accordingly, they all sate in silence while Ellinor enjoyed her fish, and Mrs. Dalton watched her calm equanimity with ill-suppressed wrath.

"Your ladyship, also, was too late," said Ellinor, with perfect unconcern as she dismissed her plate, "for I see you have not had time to dress."

Lady Ashford did not appear to hear her, but Lord Ashford's anger seemed now to break through the restraint he had imposed upon it, for he said, looking up with gleaming eyes :

“I am very much surprised, Miss Grey, that you should have taken the liberty of appearing at this table so unceremoniously.”

This anger was thrown away on Ellinor, who only said with an air of unconcern, that as she was so late she had chosen what appeared the least of two evils, and had preferred waiting till after dinner to change her dress, rather than delay longer.

Nothing is so good for a temper like Lord Ashford's, as to show that you are not afraid of it ; accordingly, the storm was allayed for the present, and an uneasy sort of calm ensued, which lasted till the dessert

being placed on the table the servants had retired ; when Mrs. Dalton, who seemed unable to endure to see Ellinor escape so easily, said :

“I suppose your friends, the Bucktons made themselves particularly charming, as you forgot yourself so completely as to the hour, Miss Grey. I presume they brought you back in their carriage.”

“Is it possible, Miss Grey,” said Lord Ashford, opening his eyes very wide, “that you have, in spite of the offence you knew it would give me, been in company with any of Sir Frederick Buckton’s family ?”

Ellinor was silent, but betrayed no uneasy emotion.

“I thought,” continued Lord Ashford, with increased severity ; “I had made myself completely understood on this point ;

it seems, however, that I have been mistaken."

After a moment's pause he resumed :—

"I now beg, once for all, that every member of my family, as well as all those who do me the honour to use my house as if it were their own," here he looked at Mrs. Dalton, "may comprehend, that if their attachment to that gentleman's family is so great as to render it impossible for them to refrain from its society, my door will in future be closed against them."

Ellinor made no reply, continuing to look as cheerful as she had done before. Mrs. Dalton drew herself up in her chair ; her colour heightened, and she returned on Lord Ashford his own angry expression of eye. She was going to say something quite

outrageous, but Mrs. Grey stopped her with a deprecating look, saying gently :

“Do not, dear Mrs. Dalton, talk about Sir Frederick just now. You see it annoys Lord Ashford.”

She then tried to turn the conversation, and to talk on some indifferent subject.

Meanwhile Ellinor began to express her surprise to Lady Ashford at not having found her in Devonshire Street as she expected. No subject had been capable of drawing Lady Ashford from her state of gloomy abstraction, otherwise she would certainly have remembered and fulfilled her intention to desire that no one should mention the circumstance of her sitting for her picture before Lord Ashford until she herself found an opportunity to do so.

Lady Ashford, not hearing or not heeding Ellinor's observation, the young lady

turned to Lord Ashford, quite as unconcernedly as if no severe rebukes or angry words addressed to her had ever issued from his lips, and asked him "If he was not very much surprised to hear that Lady Ashford was sitting for her picture?"

It was now Mrs. Dalton's turn to be uneasy, for she was perfectly conscious that whatever might be the solution of the mystery—and mystery there certainly was—between Lord Ashford and Mrs. Merton, any interference on her part would be sure to offend him; though she was little aware how seriously. She therefore tried to make a diversion by another allusion to Ellinor's morning drive with Lady Buckton. But at the first mention of this proscribed name, Lord Ashford exclaimed:

"Pray, madam, let me hear no more about any one belonging to Sir Frederick



Buckton. Surely, enough has already been said on this odious subject to satisfy any one, however resolved to annoy me, that I will not permit it to be mentioned in my presence."

Then softening his voice, and assuming a calm and polite manner, he added: "So, Miss Grey, you have been persuading Lady Ashford to patronize some *protégée* of yours, I suppose. Pray, who is it?"

"No, indeed, the artist to whom Lady Ashford is sitting is no *protégée* of mine. I had not the merit of finding her out, nor had I heard of her till to-day. I believe it was Mrs. Dalton who recommended her to Lady Ashford. Was it not you, Mrs. Dalton, who took Lady Ashford to Mrs. Merton?"

Mrs. Dalton appeared to be talking very

earnestly to Mrs. Grey, and did not reply.

“Was it not you, Mrs. Dalton,” repeated Ellinor, “who took Lady Ashford to Devonshire Street, to Mrs. Merton’s, the artist?”

“Madam,” exclaimed Lord Ashford, pale with emotion, and glaring upon Mrs. Dalton; “by what right is it that you presume to pry into my affairs in this manner?”

“*Your* affairs, my lord!” interrupted Mrs. Dalton sarcastically.

He took no notice of the interruption, but proceeded:—

“You have thrust yourself, madam, not only uninvited, but I must say undesired, into my house, where, by your insufferably officious interference, you will never rest

till you have rendered it a hell upon earth. By what right, I repeat it, have you dared to thrust yourself with this prying interference into my affairs ?”

“ My lord, I will not permit myself to be addressed in this manner. I am in my sister’s house as her guest, where I claim to be treated with the respect due, not only to myself, but to her sister ; and, let me add, where I will not sit still and see her treated as it is evident to me she has been and is treated. On comparing all that has passed with your present excitement and violence, I see very clearly that I was right in suspecting as I did, the moment I saw Mrs. Merton at Richmond, that you knew perfectly well why she was there ; and——”

“ Silence !” roared Lord Ashford. “ I

command you to be silent, vile calumniator, and to leave my house instantly."

"I shall not require a repetition of your hospitable command, my lord," said Mrs. Dalton, rising from her chair with great dignity. "I merely wait to know, Lady Ashford, whether you choose to sit in silence and see your sister insulted in this manner."

"I have already told you, Janet," said Lady Ashford, raising her head from her hand; "that your allusion to such a subject was most offensive and improper. I never could have supposed that you would be guilty of so great a breach of decorum as to interfere further, and, above all, to Lord Ashford."

"Then," replied Mrs. Dalton, "I have only to take leave of the present company,

thanking both you and his lordship for having tolerated my unwelcome presence so long, and begging to assure you that I shall never again intrude on your hospitality. As to you," she added, her eyes lighting with sudden fury as she turned them upon Ellinor, "as to you who sit smiling there, I need only hope that you may be permitted to pursue your own course ; in that case you will amply return to this house a full measure—heaped up, of retaliation for this conduct to me. Your mother, too—Mrs. Grey, I wish you joy of your charming daughter. Good evening." So saying she left the room.

It will not be supposed that Mrs. Grey allowed this painful scene to pass without making several attempts to recall her brother to a sense, if not of kindness, at least of

politeness ; attempts, however, which failed to produce the least result. Neither were her efforts with Lady Ashford more successful, who withdrew her arm from the gentle touch she gave it in making an appeal to her, as if there were pollution in it. Constance, finding that there was nothing to be done towards reconciling her angry relations at present, remained silent ; but it seemed as if the tedious period would never be over before Lady Ashford would choose to rise from the dinner-table. Twenty minutes at least passed in a constrained silence, broken only by two or three very injudicious attempts at conversation on the part of Ellinor, while they all kept their places. At last, Lady Ashford, looking at Miss Grey, said, “ We had better go up-stairs, my dear,” and taking her by the arm, she walked hastily to the door, and there waited to

allow Mrs. Grey to pass. Lord Ashford did not rise, as usual, to open the door for them, but continued to sit as he had done ever since Mrs. Dalton's departure, with his head bowed down, shading his face with his hand.

The affectionate heart of Constance could well divine the expression of anguish concealed by that trembling hand, though of the true meaning of the scene, she was in such complete ignorance, as sometimes to imagine that the actors in it had lost their senses. She passed close by her brother's chair with a faint hope that he would, perhaps, speak or move, but he remained mute and motionless; she therefore walked on, leaving the two ladies who stood ceremoniously aside, to follow her up-stairs. She entered the drawing-room, and then threw herself on a sofa, exhausted with fatigue

after the painful scene. No one accompanied her, and supposing that Lady Ashford had gone to seek her sister, she comforted herself with the hope of a speedy reconciliation.

In a short time Mrs. Dalton's maid entered, equipped in bonnet and cloak, and began in a hurried manner to collect several articles belonging to her mistress, such as work-boxes, books, &c.

"Is Lady Ashford with your mistress?" said Mrs. Grey.

"Oh dear, no, ma'am. My mistress went away in a coach directly she left the dining-room, and she has sent me back to put up her things, which she has ordered me to do without a moment's delay."

Constance having no opportunity of effecting or even attempting a reconciliation, was on the point of withdrawing to the quiet



sanctuary of her own rooms, when a message was brought to her from Lord Ashford, to say that he had gone there in search of her, and requesting her immediate presence.

## CHAPTER XVI.

“ Amongst the rest a small unsightly root,  
But of divine effect, he cull’d me out ;  
The leaf was darkish and had prickles on it,  
But in another country, as he said,  
Bore a bright golden flower.”

MILTON.

HE was walking up and down the room in great agitation when she entered, and continued to do so for several minutes without taking any notice of her, uttering, from time to time, groans and sighs of anguish. At last he stopped and flung

himself into a chair with his eyes closed, as if to try to shut out some wretched image that was haunting him. Constance went to him directly, and put her arm as tenderly round his neck as she was wont to do when they were both children, and now she put aside the rich, dark, locks of hair from his fine forehead, just as she did then, and imprinted tender kisses there. By degrees, he allowed her to draw his head towards her, and rest it on her arm, and there was a moistening round his eye-lids that seemed as if her gentle, compassionating tears had softened the harsh and rigid expression of his face. For several minutes the brother and sister remained thus. As she had so often soothed him in his boyish afflictions, her affectionate efforts again proceeded

“Upon the plan that pleased his childish thought;”

—and a hope began to spring up in her heart, that perhaps, out of all this strange misery, happiness might result in a renewed sympathy between them ; and a return to the affection of their early days.

But as if he divined this hope, and wished to dash it to the ground at once, he suddenly raised his head and withdrew himself from her tender, compassionating touch, saying :

“Enough of this, my good Constance. Enough, thank you ;” and he appeared to struggle against a tenderness which for a moment had subdued him.

“I sent for you,” he continued, “to beg the favour of your assistance in a most painful and delicate affair, and I feel sure that to the utmost of your power you will give it to me.”

“Of course I will,” she replied, suppressing a deep sigh as she felt her hope fade away.

He remained silent for a moment, and Constance resumed :—

“Will you explain to me the meaning of what has occurred this evening. I am unable to imagine what can be amiss with you all?”

“It is not necessary that you should know,” he replied gloomily. “I did not beg the favour of your presence to answer questions, nor do I consider myself bound to make confessions.”

“My dearest Gerard, my only desire is to help you, and I only wish to know the cause of your suffering, that I may the better judge of the true remedy.”

“I am the better judge of that. I sent for you, Mrs. Grey, not to give you an op-

portunity of prying into my affairs, or of offering me the advantage of your reproof or counsel ; but being your brother, I thought I might venture to ask for your assistance."

Constance made no answer ; she felt the deepest pity for him ; her heart was wounded, but she endeavoured to hide the pain he inflicted. He perceived and appreciated the effort ; the radiance of the angelic feeling of sisterly love, which beamed in her countenance, was poured into his stern, hard heart, to bear fruit, not now, but in due season.

Dear Constance, how many bitter words, biting sarcasms, and cold sneers have you endured patiently, always ready when you felt it would accomplish a gentle purpose, to give a kiss for a blow. If they smote you on the one cheek, how truly did you

turn to them the other, clothing it with smiles, at the risk of that being wounded also. Strong in your tender gentleness, victorious in your yielding peacefulness, weak only when you were goaded into self-defence, and never vulnerable but when you condescended to use the vulgar weapons with which you were attacked!

Constance knew not, nor suspected the power that lay in her gentle smiles. She was not conscious that not one of them was shed without bearing its heavenly fruit, though it might be buried for long seasons under the withering frost of taunts and scoffs. Had she known that each seed thus sown yielded fruit ten-fold, her life would have ceased to be joyless. She would no longer have regarded herself as one born out of due season, oppressed, undervalued, and despised; and then when

she withdrew into solitude to see God, or to converse with Angels, she would have returned refreshed by this glorious communion, to resume her good work joyfully. But this was not granted to her. She went forth as one bearing precious seed, and weeping, not knowing that she would come again with rejoicing, bearing her sheaves with her. She never knew that the gift of a gentle, pure, loving spirit is the greatest and strongest that can be communicated by God to man. Hence it was, that now, sitting, as it were, under the shadow of the Cross, she waited, smiling sadly, till her brother, after a long pause, resumed :

“Constance,” said he, “I do not wish you to ask me any questions, nor to form any surmises, but simply and implicitly to obey my directions.”



“ I am willing, my dear brother, to do as you wish ; though I work in the dark, there may, perhaps, be a chance of my doing some good, if you think so.”

“ I wish you, then, to go to Lady Ashford, who has, owing to Mrs. Dalton’s slanderous insinuations and lies, got some fatal notions into her head ; fatal to her peace, and ruinous to my reputation and honour. I wish you to say to her, (I know that you have more influence with her than any one else) ; I wish you to say to her from me, that I am aware of her suspicions, and of the grounds upon which they have been raised, but that she must accept my solemn assurance that she is mistaken—wholly mistaken. Upon my soul she is, Constance. The person upon whom these suspicions have fallen is one to whom Lady

Ashford performed an act of almost unexampled hospitality and kindness."

"What! that lady of whom I have heard, who was nearly killed at Richmond? Mrs. Merton?"

"Yes," said Lord Ashford, putting on a look of excessive astonishment at the absurdity of the suspicions to which he had fallen a victim. "Can you conceive anything so absolutely ridiculous!"

"But I cannot imagine how any suspicions could attach themselves to you out of——"

"Of course, no rational being can imagine it; but when women are resolved to raise up a mountain of sorrow for themselves they are never at a loss for a good beginning. And the circumstance upon which this whole affair rests is—that it

devolved on me, most unhappily, to announce to this unfortunate lady that a great domestic calamity—in fact, that she was bereaved of—in short, that she had lost her husband. It was dreadful.”

He turned pale, and absolutely shivered with emotion as he finished.

“Dear Gerard, how good and sympathizing your heart is!”

“No, no! But I hate to be compelled to talk of these things, yet you force me to do it with your questionings. Well, since that cursed day, I have never, as I tell you, and you must have the goodness to take me at my word,—never once,—and it is seven years since this happened,—seen her; neither have I had any intercourse with her by letter, and even the money which I had the misfortune to be charged with the duty of transmitting to her at one time, passed

through the hands of a third person ; but even this has now altogether ceased. You must, then, see how more than absurd such a suspicion must be.”

“ So very absurd that I cannot imagine why you take the trouble to pay any attention to it, or think it worth while to make such a statement.”

“ Because there are circumstances which might give a colour to it, and I wish you to convince Lady Ashford, and to say that I solemnly assure her, that from that day, I have neither seen, nor spoken to, nor corresponded with the person I have alluded to.”

There was a pause of some minutes, when Constance said gently :

“ I will do this as you wish it. But I cannot understand why you do not speak to Lady Ashford yourself. It seems to me

that it is due to her that you should, and it would be so much more convincing from you, than——”

“ Oh! since you wish to decline giving me your help it would be better to say so without any of these subterfuges. Good night, Mrs. Grey.”

“ Dearest Gerard, do not misunderstand me. I will do anything in my power to make you happier. I was merely offering you my advice, from a sincere desire that this which you wish done should be done in the most effectual manner.”

“ If you wish to help me, be so good as to attend to my requests, and to follow them implicitly. I am obliged to go out for an hour,” he added, opening the door to go, so as to put an end to the conversation.

“ Come in first, and see your little Matilda,” said Constance, taking him by the

arm, and leading him through an adjoining room into one where the child lay in her bed, in a profound sleep.

He stood at the foot of the bed, and as he watched her, it seemed as if the lovely peace and calm of the slumbering child reached his troubled brow, and by degrees spread itself over his anxious face, smoothing away the lines of care, sorrow, and anger.

“What is it that she has in her little arms?” he whispered, after some moments of silent contemplation.

“Oh, my lord!” said the nurse, “Mrs. Grey likes Miss Matilda to be indulged in having it when she wishes it; it is a book she is fond of, in which she keeps several favourite pictures; to day Miss Matilda brought home a new one, or something of the sort, which she got when she was out with my lady.”

“ Good God ! was she with Lady Ashford this morning ? ”

“ Yes, my lord,” replied the nurse, looking puzzled at the exclamation ; “ and Miss Matilda, I believe, was rather troublesome. Little dear ! she is very good when she is with you, ma’am, but she has too much temper for my lady.”

Matilda’s arms were loosened by sleep from the book, and the nurse took it up softly, and in her zeal to show Lord Ashford ail she could about her young charge, she turned over the leaves, saying :—

“ Here is the picture she brought home to-day, and this the little dear said was her papa’s tree. Children have such odd fancies, my lord,—I am sure your lordship will excuse my telling you.”

He would have excused whatever she might have pleased to say, for no sooner

had he opened the crumpled piece of paper which enclosed a card, than he saw fastened on it, with a taste and delicacy which he immediately recognised, as the work of one hand only in the whole world, a small spray of cypress, beneath which was written, in very small letters, the words :—" In memory of the home his love gave to me."

Overpowered by various emotions, the unhappy Lord Ashford sank into a chair by his child's bed, and covered his face with his trembling fingers. Dreadfully alarmed, Constance had still the presence of mind to send the nurse on some pretended errand, and to seem to take no notice of what she had seen, as he evidently desired to conceal his feelings. Several minutes passed in silence, and at last the nervous trembling diminished, and the deadly paleness disappeared. He then rose, and almost staggering to the door



he opened it quickly and said, in a hurried manner:—

“Be so good as to execute my commission without delay.”

So saying he closed the door, and Constance was left charged with the execution of this embarrassing task, in which she began to perceive that there might be something of greater import than she had at first supposed.

## CHAPTER XVII.

“ Alas ! the woe, the solitude, the moan,  
The weeping in a castle all alone.”

CHAUCER.

MRS. GREY walked slowly down-stairs, thinking how best she should commence the performance of her office, but on entering the drawing-room she found it still deserted. Determined, however, not to neglect her brother's urgent wishes, she went to Lady Ashford's dressing-room ; it was also empty

and nearly dark ; she then passed on to the bedroom, and in answer to a very gentle knock, Lady Ashford's maid cautiously and noiselessly opened the door, but before speaking closed it behind her.

“ What is it you may please to be wanting ? ” she asked, in a stiff, prim manner, with her northern accent, so as to convey the impression that this intrusion was most unwelcome.

“ I am afraid Lady Ashford is not well, Morrison.”

“ No, maim, my lady is far from well.”

“ Do you think she would dislike my going to her for a few minutes ? ”

“ I have her ladyship's commands, Mrs. Grey, maim, not to disturb her, nor to allow her to be disturbed.”

“ But what I have to say would, I think, be soothing. I have a message from my

brother, which he is very desirous should be delivered to her directly."

"Her ladyship, maim, and I hope you will not consider it as any disrespect to you, maim, particularly, told me not to allow you, maim, to go to her to-night, nor to carry her any messages from Lord Ashford."

"Still, dear Annie," said Mrs. Grey, very kindly, and taking her bony hand, "I know you so well, and know how much you love your lady, and how much good sense you have, that I must yet urge you to go to her, and say how I wish to see her for a few minutes. You must see she has something on her mind, and that if this were removed she would be better directly, and I can indeed remove it, so do try. I will wait here, and you must manage this."

Mrs. Grey sat down in Morrison's chair and turned up the lamp, which had been

lowered to give as little light as possible without going quite out. Morrison lingered and hesitated, but at last went into the bedroom very softly and slowly, after placing a screen so that none of the light from the lamp might fall on the opening door.

Thus alone again, Mrs. Grey lifted Morrison's work from an open Bible, in which she had apparently been reading a chapter in the Proverbs of Solomon. As Constance mechanically turned over the leaves of the book, too much engrossed with her own thoughts to read, she happened to open it at the first page, on which was written in a child's hand, "The Hon. Miss Catherine Grant, of Strathfinnan Castle, on her twelfth birth-day, to her dear foster-sister, Annie Morrison." It was dated Strathfinnan Castle, 5th Jan. 18—.

A melancholy smile passed over the coun-

tenance of Constance, as she read this ostentatious inscription, her imagination going back to the time when it was written, and to the distant home of her sister-in-law, with all its northern pomp and pride, and strong family adhesiveness, now exchanged for one where all the prejudices, and almost sacred peculiarities, which cling round even the highest ranks of the Scotch, were totally disregarded, and where, as she could not but acknowledge to herself, there had been but little love to compensate for their loss. Annie Morrison had accompanied Lady Ashford from Scotland, when she was brought thence by Lord Ashford as his bride ; and it was one of the reasons why, in spite of considerable personal beauty, and the most costly dresses, Lady Ashford had always somewhat of a dowdy air, that nothing could induce her to exchange Mor-

rison's attendance on her toilette for that of a smarter and more competent tire-woman. While Annie, on her part, would have considered that she was betraying and forsaking her country, if she had permitted the slightest innovation to be made in certain received notions, that were in vogue at Strathfinnan Castle, on the subject of flannels, stout shoes, night-caps, &c., so that Constance looked round on relays of undergarments, woollens, under stockings, &c., airing on screens at the fire on this night in May, which might have served as a comfortable winter store for an English old woman of eighty. The unconquered habits and prejudices which were suggested by them, offered in their turn a further suggestion that possibly, on more important points, Lady Ashford's mind might be as unreasonable as Lord Ashford had asserted.

Half-an-hour passed before Morrison returned, and when she did so, Constance saw that her eyes were red, as if she had been crying, and that she was colder and stiffer in her behaviour, even than before.

“My lady, maim, desires me to say, that she will esteem it a favour to be left undisturbed for this night, and that to-morrow she will hear his lordship’s message, if he and you please, maim.”

Constance did not go away immediately, as Morrison evidently hoped and intended, but lingered anxiously, uncertain what to do.

“Do you think Lady Ashford very unwell?”

“My lady is very far from well, maim.”

“Is she often so, dear Morrison?”

“It cannot be doubted, maim, but that my lady must often look back to her own



home with a sore heart, where she was the pride and the darling, and where she was the mistress, as well as the only child, as may be said."

"Her brother, the present Lord Strathfinnan, was not much at home was he?" said Mrs. Grey.

"He was away on his travels, maim, and my lady's sister, the Honorable Miss Grant, the first Lady Strathfinnan's daughter, was married before my lady was fifteen years old; and my lord, her ladyship's father, though he was a stern man was never so to her; so that till she came to live in the South, she never had a tear in her eye from want of kindness. But the Lord's will must be done."

After a short silence Annie continued:—

"It was on this day fifteen years back that her ladyship's mother died. It was on

this day seven years back, that my lady came to London with her sister, Mrs. Dalton, where she became acquainted with his lordship, Lord Ashford ; and it was on this day six years back, that her own cousin, Mr. Charles Graham, who had always been named to her, died of heart break, because she had married his lordship, as I think I may say. It is not to be wondered at, then, that her ladyship may sometimes turn back to her own pleasant land with a sore heart."

"It is very true, dear Annie. But I will not stay now and detain you from her. Say to her, if you can, from me, that I would do anything in the world to make her happier. But if you think it best not to do so," she added, as Morrison slowly shook her head, "never mind. Good night, and God bless you for your care of her and

your unalterable affection. She will never be without a friend while you live. Of that I am sure."

Morrison was not in the least softened or moved by Mrs. Grey's expressions of sympathy. She would have considered, that she was taking part with one of her lady's natural enemies, if she had abated a look or a feeling of cold repulsiveness; and the moment she was gone, she lowered the lamp and returned to her place by Lady Ashford's pillow, carefully excluding anything like an emotion of kindness towards his lordship's sister.

But for her lady, Morrison, stiff and cold as she was, possessed a devotion and love that amounted almost to adoration, mingled with such entire abnegation of herself, and such absolute humility, that it never for a moment, occurred to her, to presume to ask

the meaning of the dreadful grief which she witnessed. She did not even permit herself to guess at its cause. It was, indeed, a grief profound and intense. The unhappy lady did not suffer from the loss, or apprehended loss of her husband's affection, for she had felt from the very first day of their marriage that he did not love her ; but she had fancied that he could not love any one ; and through their whole married life, so entirely cautious had he been to hide from her every suspicious circumstance that, but for Mrs. Dalton's inuendos, and Sir Frederick Buckton's coarse jests, no such suspicion would ever have crossed her imagination. In general society, women seemed to be totally disregarded by him. Invariably he had treated her, and her alone with attention ; and if in their own domestic retirement they were absolutely as nothing

to each other, to this she had long accustomed herself, carefully shutting up her own heart, in impenetrable reserve, never allowing a single feeling to escape, never showing either love, or anger, or sorrow, or joy, but burying all under a hollow mask of cold, quiet politeness. But now, when she saw Bertha in Devonshire-street, and was struck by her strong resemblance, not only to Lord Ashford, but still more to his sister Mrs. Grey; when she accidentally saw that very peculiar mark on the forehead, common to him and to her own child; it seemed as if a tide of most painful certainties had broken in upon her. It only wanted one more confirmation to remove every doubt, and that one was afforded when Matilda threw the picture into her lap. She saw it distinctly, and she instantly recognized it as a portrait of her husband. She had sufficient

presence of mind to leave the pretended Mrs. Merton without compromising her dignity, but no sooner was she alone, than she recalled all that happened at Richmond ; Sir Frederick Buckton's story of having met Lord Ashford riding with this lady ; his extraordinary emotion at the accident ; his riding off himself to procure medical assistance ; the scene upon which she and Mrs. Dalton accidentally intruded ; all these things returned to her memory, and convinced her that her husband's apparent coldness was a deception, that his seeming propriety of conduct was hypocrisy ; and that in fact, Mrs. Merton was a beloved, cherished, and tenderly protected mistress, and Bertha their child.

All this had come upon her so unexpectedly ; the feeling of humiliation was so new to her ; the contempt and indignation

excited in her breast towards her husband were so bitter, and so hard to endure ; the loathing she felt to Mrs. Grey because she was his sister, and because she was so like Bertha, produced in her mind a tempest of emotion, of which no one judging from the coldness of her manner, would have thought her susceptible. She had too much prudence, however, and was too much in the habit of controlling every impulse, to yield, as most women would have done, to the misery of the moment. Hence it was that she had preserved throughout the rest of the day and the ordeal of dinner, her resolution to do nothing violent or decisive, to take no step hastily, or without due consideration. But now in the sanctuary of her own room, sheltered by the solitude and the darkness, she shed torrents of tears, and filled the air with her moans ; her head supported by her

devoted foster-sister ; sometimes bewailing her own hard fate ; sometimes mourning over the wretched conviction that her respect and trust in her husband were rent asunder ; sometimes reproaching herself for having failed in her duty, and thus caused the calamity which had befallen her ; and sometimes tortured with the remembrance of her former lover, Mr. Graham ; then she called to mind how *he* had worshipped her very shadow ; how her slightest word, or look of kindness had been treasured up by him, and how she had despised him for this very devotion, and had given her heart and hand, and her immense wealth to a stranger, who now despised her in her turn, while he who would have loved her if she had been destitute, or a beggar, was dead, dead of a broken heart.

Full of sympathy for the suffering she



had not been permitted to soothe, though little guessing its depth and intensity, Constance left Lady Ashford's apartments and went in quest of Ellinor, whom she found in her own room, dressing.

"There is no great occasion for dress this evening, Ellinor. Lady Ashford is gone to bed ill, my brother is out, and we had better remain quietly by ourselves."

"Oh, I am going to a ball. Pray don't look so astonished, dear mamma! and don't put on that deplorable face again, or I shall never be able to finish dressing for laughing;" and she gave way to an uncontrollable fit of merriment.

"What can your purpose be?" inquired her mother.

"I never shall be able to think of to-day's dinner with any sort of gravity," she con-

tinued, without heeding the question. "Certainly so absurd a scene never took place in any house where the people are not supposed to be mad. It seemed as if some evil genius turned every word that any body could say into the most deadly offence to all the others. There sat Mrs. Dalton snarling all round. There sat Lady Ashford with that great shawl on that she invariably wears when she is offended. There sat Lord Ashford like an enraged despot ; and you, dear mamma, looking so unspeakably piteous, that I could scarcely contain myself, notwithstanding the mortal dread I was under of Lord Ashford. Don't be angry, dear little mamma, but if you could but have seen your own face, you would not wonder that I laugh when I think of it. How it is to end I cannot think, or how Mrs. Dalton is to be appeased I cannot imagine."

“Mrs. Dalton, I am sorry to say, has gone away.”

“Gone! How can you say you are sorry? Why, I think that all the awful events of to-day are cheaply purchased by her absence. Why, if she is gone, I need not have cared at staying here.”

“I do not understand you. Are you not staying here?”

“I am going away in half an hour. You are so occupied with dear Mrs. Dalton that you forget to ask where I am going, and I am quite prepared for a fresh look of wonder when you learn that in spite of Lord Ashford’s denunciations against all such offenders, I am going to-night to a ball at Lady Buckton’s. It is her farewell ball, and I would not miss it on any account. Do you not think I am very brave?”

“On the contrary, I think you very weak not to be able to resist a love of pleasure to-night, which is to be enjoyed at the expense of so much pain to-morrow.”

“Oh, but I shall not have to suffer any pain whatever to-morrow. I am to sleep there, and shall not return till the day after to-morrow, at soonest.”

Mrs. Grey was silent for a few minutes, and then said :

“Ellinor, I request you not to do this. It would give, and justly, the greatest displeasure to Lord Ashford to whom you owe respect.”

Ellinor went on dressing as before, and had her hand on the bell to ring for the maid to assist her, but Mrs. Grey stopping her, said :

“Ellinor, I must beg of you to attend to me !”

“I do attend to you, mamma, and I think it quite natural for you to feel as you do, because you have never had any will of your own. But I do not choose to submit to such absurdities, or to take the slightest notice of such feelings as those of Lord Ashford, except to laugh at them. Those are not his true friends who are weak enough to encourage him in them.”

“As to the best mode of correcting Lord Ashford’s faults, you are quite mistaken in supposing that you know it. Besides which, it is not your part to occupy yourself with any such undertaking. But it is your duty to avoid outraging his expressed wishes, when all you have to do is to sacrifice some momentary pleasure.”

“I was quite prepared for your saying this, but we view this matter from opposite

points, and you are not likely to influence my opinion upon it."

"If you do not feel respect for Lord Ashford's wishes, you ought, at least, to remember that your brother's success in the world depends, for the future, in a great measure on his kindness, and that Charles owes to him the advantage of a princely education. If you choose to pursue this headstrong course, Lord Ashford is quite capable of withdrawing from him."

"Well, I am not at all answerable for any bad or unreasonable actions Lord Ashford may think proper to commit. Besides which, I do not choose to have all my pleasures and interests cut short on my brother's account. Charles must see to his affairs as I shall to mine. I do not ask or expect any one to interfere in this matter, or to take

the trouble to make any apologies on account of my arrangements, and I cannot help despising you, mamma, when you allow yourself to be so anxious about feelings which every reasonable person must have a contempt for. Will you have the goodness to ring again? I cannot think why Jane does not answer the bell."

"Jane has gone to see her mother to-night."

"Oh, then I must get Morrison to dress me."

"That is impossible also, as she is engaged with Lady Ashford."

"Then I must beg you, if you please, to fasten my dress. Pray do not fasten it so tight at the top. I hate to have my shoulders so confined. No—I will not have all that muffling up, so you need not look so

shocked, dear mamma ; you know I will have my own way."

Having completed her toilette, Ellinor packed a carpet bag, said she should send a note to tell Jane what things to send her next day, ran down to the drawing-room, rang the bell, and directed the servant who answered it, to order round the carriage, into which, when it was announced, she desired him to place her package, and then to attend her himself to Sir Frederick Buckton's.

Constance, once more alone, slowly went to her own room, pained by the behaviour of the daughter she had so carefully educated, dissatisfied with herself, and wearied with all the troubles of the day. Before going to rest she wrote a few lines to Lord Ashford, to tell him of her bad success as to



his commission ; and then once more visited Matilda's quiet bed, according to her nightly custom.

The child lay in a profound sleep ; her breathing was scarcely audible. There was strength on the broad open forehead, and sensibility in the eyelids and brows. Her hands, folded palm to palm in the manner often assumed in prayer, lay under her firm rounded cheek. The whole attitude displayed the graceful rest of a pure spirit in a body full of health and vigour. It was a sight that should have brought peace to her, to whom was due so much of the peace she contemplated ; without whom, that child was likely to become habitually irritable, proud, and violent ; who was her soother of sorrows, her calmer of passions, her guide and teacher, her cheerful, playful companion. But no peace came over the pale face that

watched her there ; and the words, “ Will this also be a failure ? ” escaped from the agitated lips.

After a sleepless night Constance went down on the following morning to the breakfast-room, prepared for a very uncomfortable *tête-à-tête* with her brother ; but to her surprise she found Lady Ashford there making breakfast ; looking exactly as usual, polite, cold, nicely dressed, altogether as if nothing had happened. To a kind inquiry as to her health, she replied that she had had a headache the night before, but had perfectly covered.

There was a quiet opportunity now to deliver the message about which Lord Ashford was so earnest ; but it seemed to Constance a pity to go back upon the griefs of yesterday ; she hesitated—servants came in—Lord Ashford then appeared, and before

taking his place, went with nervous, anxious looks to Lady Ashford, who answered his kind and courteous questionings in a manner that was at once indifferent and perfectly polite, but contrived to have her hands so occupied with the tea equipage as to avoid touching his when he offered it. The servants had gone. In passing Constance's chair he said in a low tone, "Have you spoken to her?" and on hearing her answer in the negative, he replied, "Do so *now*, then," and left the room.

"I am charged with a message to you, Lady Ashford, a message from my brother," she began:—

"I beg to decline hearing it. I thank you. But I am perfectly acquainted with the truth on the affair in question. No one knows Lord Ashford more thoroughly than I do."

It was impossible to proceed ; it would have required a much firmer will than Mrs. Grey's to break the ice in which the heart she desired to reach was encased. From that moment not another word was uttered on the subject in the family circle.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

“A dull pain cleaveth brain and bone,  
I feel a pang till now unknown ;  
Stay with me for one little hour.”

MARY HOWITT.

It was a long time before Leonora could make out from Clara's incoherent account what had really taken place ; she had found her excited, bewildered ; her face flushed, and she was wandering restlessly about the room.

Leonora's first care was to bring her down

stairs to their cheerful sitting-room, but she could not be prevailed on to take any refreshment. Clara saw, however, the anxiety of her friend to be informed of the cause of her great distress, and at last she said :—

“Oh, Leonora, this has been a horrible day. My head is bewildered, and I scarcely know what has really happened ; but I have had a great sorrow, and one which I am ashamed to acknowledge to myself. I will tell you the truth, and you will help me to bear my misery.”

“Yes, you know you may tell me every thing.”

“Leonora, he loves *her*,—they are happy together, and I am forgotten.”

Her lips were parched, and her voice was scarcely beyond a whisper as she continued :—

“Yes, it is true. Miss Grey has given

me the history of their life, their daily life their devotedness to each other."

"But can you depend upon your witness?"

"Why should I mistrust her? You shake your head; you do not credit her account. Oh that I, too, could disbelieve it!"

"But were it true that they are happy, should that be a cause of suffering to you?"

"Yes, certainly, undoubtedly," cried Clara, in an excited manner; it shows me that I am forgotten, utterly forgotten; and until this moment I have never felt, truly felt, that he is gone from me for ever;" and she threw her arms round Leonora's neck and sobbed convulsively.

"Try to take away your thoughts from this subject," said Leonora, soothingly

“It is not worthy of you to think and feel thus. Tell me exactly what has passed this morning.”

“You know,” replied Clara, “that I had made up my mind to go through with this picture; you cannot, however, imagine the extreme anguish I have endured in seeing *her*—so beautiful—so beloved.”

“Beloved! Oh, no, Clara!”

“Yes, Leonora, it is true; there can be no doubt of it; she is beloved,—she is happy,—supremely happy; and he too is happy, and the knowledge of it has broken my heart.”

“You have been misled, depend upon it,” said Leonora.

“This grief can receive no consolation,” continued Clara, without heeding what Leonora said. “Bitter as it is, it admits of no



removal nor remedy ; and it has degraded me so low in my own eyes, that I would rather die than live."

" Wait on the Lord ; be of good courage, and he will strengthen thine heart," my Clara.

They sat for some time without speaking.—Leonora broke the silence.

" This ordeal has been too severe. We ought not to have allowed you to undertake it ; but armed as we thought you with courage, we felt that we had no right to oppose your holy and self-denying resolution——"

" You mean, then, that now at least I have forfeited your good opinion."

" No ; only that you have been wounded in the conflict, and need the help of your devoted friends."

" Oh, Leonora ! when I looked at her

to-day, and saw her proud, cold, grand, imposing beauty ; when I remembered who I was,—what I have been,—when the open window wafted the perfume from her rich dress, and I knew how a few minutes only had passed since *he*, too, had breathed in those very odours,—how they had passed from her to him.—the same which I remembered long, long ago—”

Here she stopped as if maddened by the suggestions thus vividly called up before her imagination. In a few moments she resumed, speaking now very fast:—

“ Then there came his child,—*their* child, into the room ; my first feeling towards her was that of hatred, so great that I felt sick at the sound of her voice, yet the next minute I could not venture to look at her, lest the temptation to take her in my arms and press her to my heart should become

irresistible. I tried to paint, but everything swam before my eyes. How it happened I know not ; I suddenly found that a frightful event was passing around me. I saw my picture of him in that child's hands. The sudden thought occurred to me, that *all* which I now possessed of him was passing to them. I made a violent effort to save my treasure ; it was in vain, the child threw it to her mother ; but, thank God ! the lady despised the poor possession, and left it behind her."

Leonora, while she made every effort in her power to sooth the wounded and agitated mind of her friend, could not conceal her extreme alarm at the relation she had just heard, and Clara's quick eye instantly perceived her apprehension.

" Do you think, Leonora," she said, " that

she recognized the face? That horrible idea did once occur to me."

Leonora, frightened at the effect produced by this thought, endeavoured to speak words of encouragement and hope, in the vain effort to communicate a consolation which she did not herself feel.

But Clara, attending more to the alarmed expression of her friend's face than to her words, started up and cried:—

"What have I done? I have caused his ruin, and at the very moment when I have destroyed his most cherished hopes, and heaped on him dishonour I have been lamenting over his happiness."

Leonora had exhausted all the topics of comfort she could suggest, and now remained silent, her worst fears gathering strength with every moment's reflection, and the two

friends sat together sharing the weight of their mutual anxiety.

At last Clara exclaimed:—

“ I cannot endure this terror ; I must find out whether anything dreadful has happened. It is now nearly dark ; I will go to Grosvenor Square and walk past the house ; I shall then see if anything terrible is going on. Perhaps I shall find an opportunity of inquiring of the servants whether they are all well, I am perfectly unknown to them, and they cannot suspect that I have any personal interest in asking the question.”

“ Clara, you must not think of this. We must wait till to-morrow, and endeavour to devise some other plan, We shall most probably hear something from her about the picture.”

“ To-morrow, Leonora ! With this in-

supportable terror upon me, I could not get through the night. Oh, do not, for heaven's sake, do not prevent my going."

"Then, if you are resolved to go I will accompany you ; but I insist upon it, that you shall not stir a step from this house until you have taken some refreshment : you have eaten nothing since breakfast, and it is now past eight o'clock."

"Oh, true," replied Clara quickly, "we must do what we can ; we do not know what we may be called upon to bear"—; and thereupon she ate mechanically, and, as if in a state of profound abstraction, the food that Leonora gave her.

In a few minutes they set out. It was a warm, sultry evening. Clara hurried on, almost running. Leonora had some difficulty in keeping up with her, but she indulged her in going at any pace she liked.

It was about nine o'clock when they turned the corner from Brook-street into Grosvenor-Square. Clara held her breath as they got near the house, and leaning heavily on Leonora's arm pressed forward. There stood the house as usual, in its substantial greatness, looking quite calm, with its brilliant light shining through the hall window. The drawing-room windows were open and there were lights within, but the blinds were down, and not a shadow fell on them. The lower windows were closed and dark. Without going far enough to lose sight of the door, the two friends walked slowly up and down on the opposite side next the railings of the square, for more than half an hour. No one came either in or out; neither of the watchers spoke a word; they both seemed to be choked with agitating emotion.

At last Clara said,—“It is all quiet ; let us return.”

As she spoke the hall-door suddenly opened, and Lord Ashford came hastily down the steps. It was fortunately too dark for them to see his face, or the distress depicted in it would have confirmed their worst anticipations. As it was, Leonora was obliged to hold Clara firmly and to put her arm round her waist to prevent her from following the impulse that urged her to dart forward towards him. He was entirely absorbed by his own emotions and did not see them.

When he was gone, Leonora tried to prevail on Clara to return home, but she lingered on without object or aim, till at last they saw a carriage drive to the door. The brilliant lights of the hall now showed to them Miss Grey, in a gay ball-dress slightly



covered with a shawl, issue out and take her place in it. They could see her complacent smiling face beneath the wreath of flowers, and as the carriage drove away they distinctly heard the footman call to the coachman, "Sir Frederick Buckton's."

"She does not know the value to us of that gay dress and smiling face," said Leonora, "there is nothing the matter; let us go."

As they were returning in the same direction as that by which they had come, they again met Lord Ashford walking with another gentleman. Both were talking quietly and cheerfully, and as they came up to the door, Lord Ashford's companion said,—

"It is too late to see her this evening, but pray tell her I will bring her our Scotch news to-morrow."

They then shook hands ; a few more words passed ; Lord Ashford said something at which they both laughed, when he entered the house and the stranger came down the steps. His eye caught the two friends, and he seemed inclined to follow them, but Leonora hurried Clara along till they came to a coach stand, when calling one of the carriages they got in and drove home.

“It is well that we went, Clara, for now your mind is relieved.”

“It is well,” replied Clara, mechanically not knowing what she said.

“It is such a blessing to be assured that the calamity we dreaded has not happened.”

“It is a blessing”

“I know that man, I have often seen him ; it was her brother, Lord Strathfinnan ;

there is nothing the matter ; they were just as usual."

"They were as usual," said Clara moodily.

"May they remain so."

"Yes, long may they remain so."

Her lips had echoed the words, but her heart was torn with conflicting feelings. He was safe ; he was happy ; that ought to be a comfort, and it was a comfort ; he was free to enjoy—able to share with his beautiful and beloved wife the blessings of wealth and rank ; she, a poor wanderer about the streets—in terror, in agony lest she should have injured him, lest she should have cast a shadow over his life of love and joy : she unlamented, unthought of. Joyous he was, for she had seen it ; loving he was, for Miss Grey had told her so ; and his firm, elastic step, as he walked past with *her* brother, was the buoyancy imparted by

the thought that he was near her—that he was about to rejoin her—that the night would be spent——

A dimness came over her eyes : she felt sick at heart : and the momentary unconsciousness into which she sank was followed by a sense as if the most hallowed feelings of her nature had been outraged ; this was succeeded by a state of restless impatience ; a longing desire to know more ; to witness for herself the love between them ; and she resolved to return the next day and walk again near the house, and if she should see *her* enter her carriage—if she should see him hand her into it with marks of tenderness, she would throw herself under the wheels and be crushed to death before his face.

Utterance was not given to these thoughts ; but the demon had entered her heart, and

she could not expel him ; and he constantly presented before her imagination the picture of *him* happy—of *him* loving. She was terrified at her state of feeling ; she closed her eyes ; she covered her face with her hands ; all was in vain ; she still saw ever before her that picture, and it excited a frenzy the more affecting that this terrible emotion had now taken entire possession of one of the most gentle and conscientious of human beings.

## CHAPTER XIX.

“Let the snow fall ; in time the Spring comes.”

FREDERICKE BREMER.

THERE is a certain degree of sublimity mixed with the terror which a traveller experiences amidst grand and savage scenery, when overtaken by darkness and storm. While he seems to be lost in the dismal caverns of the rocks, up which he is climbing, when at length he reaches the summit, and sees lying before him, revealed, perhaps, by the lightning's flash, his despaired of home, of safety and love, hope and cou-

rage revive. How different the feeling of him whose path lies along a dreary, barren, level waste, the atmosphere of which is loaded with dense unwholesome vapours, with no variety to excite or cheer the course he has traversed, and the distance which is still before him, alike involved in the same mass of chilling, impenetrable mist.

Such was the path which seemed now to be marked out for Clara through the remainder of her life. She had already passed through a storm in which her strength had, indeed, failed, and she had fallen exhausted to the earth ; but when its utmost fury had been spent, there still remained within her sufficient vitality to enable her again to spring from the ground and re-commence her journey with renewed energy and hope.

Then, however, the source of weakness was external. She was prostrated by events, terrible, indeed, in their own nature, but arising from causes from without, in which she had no participation, and over which

she had no control ; but now the source of weakness was in herself ; in the feelings of her own heart ; feelings which deprived her of her own self-respect, and which seemed to her to have forfeited the esteem of the only persons in the world who were dear to her ; and as she imagined, justly, since she was no longer capable of taking any interest in those beloved friends, or even in her child, or of performing any of her duties towards them. And there was this peculiar bitterness in her misery, that the unhappy feelings which had now gained the mastery over her, had deprived her not only of the power, but even of the desire to struggle against them. She lay in a state of bodily and mental prostration that might be truly called deplorable, and the earnest efforts of her ever faithful friends to rouse her from it were so unsuccessful, that after a while they abandoned the object for the present, and awaited the help of the slow but powerful physician, "Time."

Meanwhile there was another person on



whom the sight of this suffering produced a deep and lasting impression, and that was the little Bertha, who was now no longer a child. Intelligent beyond her years, acutely sensitive, and most ardently and tenderly affectionate, her curiosity was powerfully excited to understand the real nature of events which could produce such a state of mind in one so gentle and so good as her mother. The person to whom she naturally looked for information was Leonora, to whom she was as fondly attached as to her mother, and to whom she had been in the habit, from earliest childhood, of pouring out, without restraint, her inmost thoughts and feelings. She knew that Leonora was acquainted with her mother's history, and her appeal to her companion and friend to be informed of the true nature of the events was so earnest, and even impassioned, that Leonora conceived that more harm would result from mystery and concealment, on which, in the present instance, she clearly saw that imagination would be ever brooding, than was

likely to be produced by the knowledge of the truth. She therefore gave the young girl a simple narrative of the facts as far as she was herself acquainted with them. Bertha listened to the history of her father and mother calmly ; but with quiet and earnest intelligence she searched to the bottom the conditions in social life, which could render such a tragical story possible. The effect on her mind, though not sudden, was decisive, giving a colour to its views and feelings for the remainder of her life. It produced a process of thought and reasoning which she followed out unceasingly, until it ended in one result, a change in her character which no subsequent events ever materially altered.

Hitherto she had been shielded from all knowledge of evil. She had seen nothing but goodness, and had felt nothing but happiness. It had been the object of those who had taken part in her education to give her implicit faith in goodness and happiness, on the ground that these, after all, are the ordinary law of life, so predominant as to form

the rule, vice and misery being the exception and the accident ; and that it would be time enough to withdraw the veil, and to show her the reality, when her understanding should be sufficiently matured to enable her to understand the scheme of Providence, and to perceive that physical and moral evil are instruments in His hands, by which a greater amount of good is brought about, upon the whole—the whole of existence being taken into account—than could be achieved without them. Meanwhile the object in view of giving her at least a happy childhood, was so successful, that those around her thought, and constantly said to each other, that they had never before known what a child's life is capable of being, what an amount of pure and delicious enjoyment it is practicable to crowd into those early years of existence, until they had witnessed it in her.

But this fatal story brought her into immediate contact with the baseness and

misery of the world, and that too soon and too nakedly, and the consequence was,—

“As killing as the canker to the rose,  
Or frost to flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,  
When first the white thorn blows.”

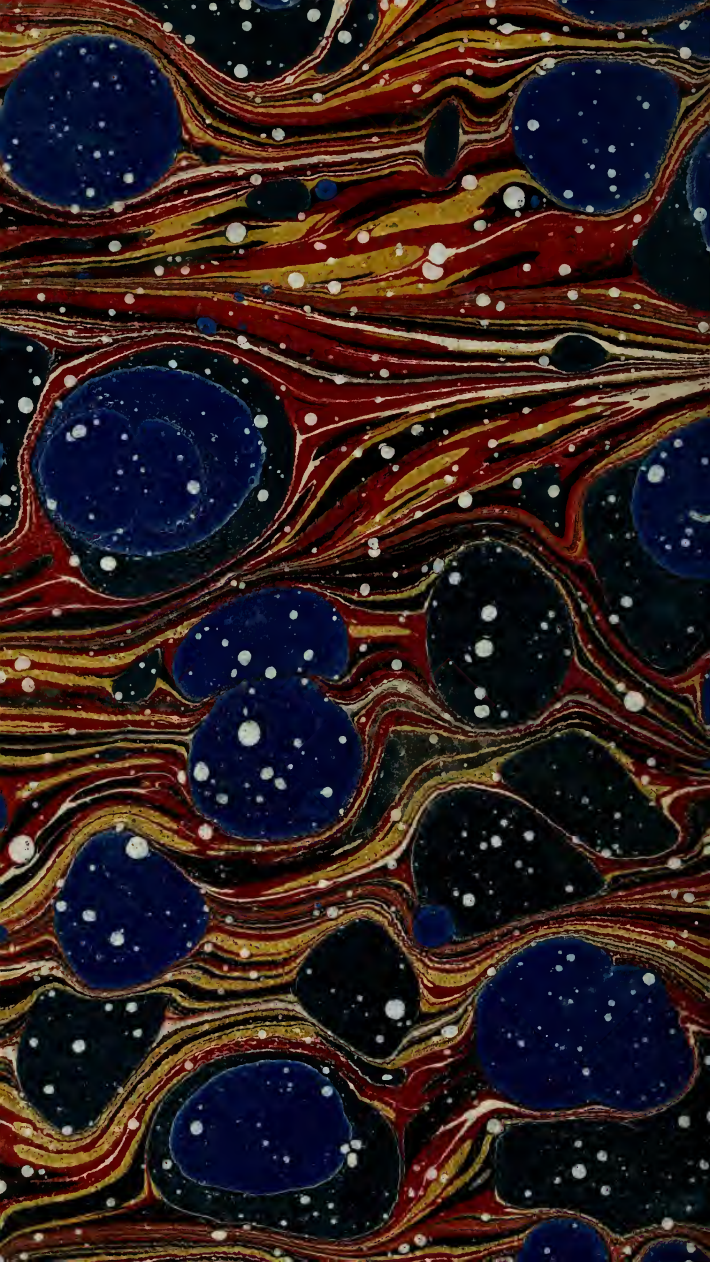
Yes, to her this frost was withering ; in her the work of the canker was destructive, but still their influence extended only to her physical health, and affected only her earthly hopes ; there was an inner being and a higher happiness, which they did not, and could not, touch !

END OF VOL. II.













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